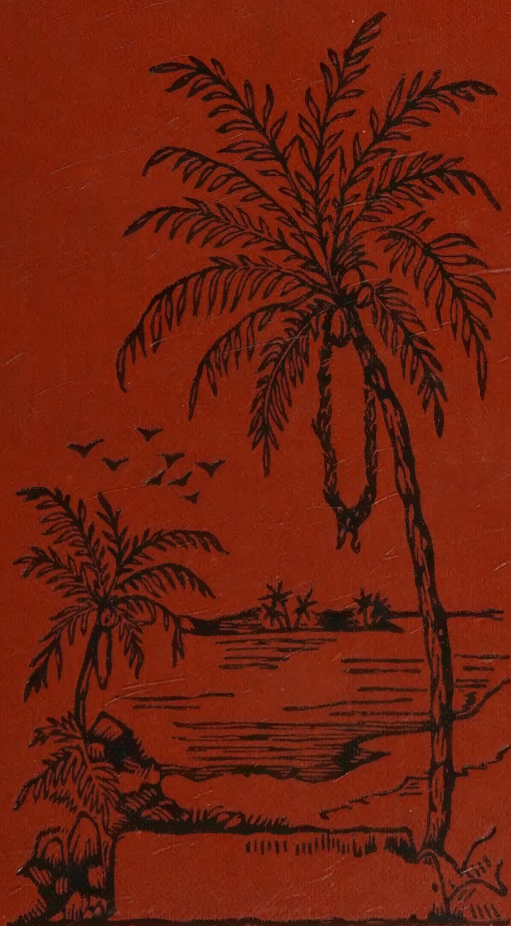


JERUSALEM

PIERRE LOTI



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JERUSALEM



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JERUSALEM FROM THE MOUNT OF OLIVES.

JERUSALEM

By
PIERRE LOTI

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY

W. P. BAINES

ILLUSTRATED



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JERUSALEM

CHAPTER I

O crux, ave spes unica !

JERUSALEM! What dying splendour clings about the name! How it radiates still, out of the depths of time and dust! Almost I feel that I am guilty of profanation in daring to place it thus, at the head of this record of my unbelieving pilgrimage.

Jerusalem! Those that have walked the earth before me have already found in it the inspiration of many books, books profound and books magnificent. All that I am going to try to do is to describe the actual aspect of its desolation and its ruins; to tell what, in our transitory epoch, is the degree of effacement suffered by its great and holy shade, which a generation soon to come will no longer be able even to discern.

Perhaps I shall tell also of the impression of a soul—my own—which was amongst the tormented spirits of this closing century. But other souls are in like case and will be able to follow me; we are of those whose lot it is to

suffer the gloomy anguish of the present day, who stand on the brink of the dark chasm into which everything seems destined to fall, there to perish utterly ; who nevertheless can still descry, in the scarce distinguishable distance, rising out of all the outworn trappings of human religions, the promise of pardon which Jesus brought, the consolation and the hope of heavenly reunion. Oh ! surely nothing else had ever any reality. All the rest is void and negligible, alike in the theorisings of the great modern philosophers as in the arcana of millenary India and in the visions of the inspired and marvellous seers of the early ages. And thus, out of the depths of our despond, there continues to ascend towards Him who once was called the Redeemer a vague, desolate adoration. . . .

Verily my book will not be able to be read and endured save by those whose great grief it is that they once possessed and now have lost the Only Hope ; by those who, doomed as I to unbelief, come yet to the Holy Sepulchre with a heart full of prayer, with eyes filled with tears, and, for a little while, would linger, kneeling, there. . . .

CHAPTER II

Monday, 26th March.

IT is Easter Monday. Arrived from the desert we awaken under tents in the middle of a cemetery of Gaza. The wild Bedouins who attended us, the camels and the dromedaries are no more. Our new men, who are Maronites, are busy saddling and harnessing our new beasts, which are horses and mules; we are striking camp preparatory to beginning our journey towards Jerusalem.

Preceded by two guards of honour allotted to us by the pasha of the town, who clear a way for us through the crowd, we traverse for a long time market-places and bazaars. Afterwards, the outskirts of the town, where the animation of the morning is localised about the wells; the whole fraternity of water-sellers is there, filling their sheepskin water-bottles and loading them on donkeys. Then come interminable debris of walls, of gateways, heaps of ruins asleep under the palms. And at length the silence of the countryside, the fields of barley, the woods of age-old olives, the beginning of the sandy road to Jerusalem where our guards leave us.

We leave this road on our left and take the simple pathways that lead through the green barley-fields to Hebron. Our arrival in the Holy City will be delayed forty-eight hours by this detour, but it is the way pilgrims are wont to follow so that they may visit the tomb of Abraham.

A journey of some thirty miles to-day, through fields of velvety barley, broken by regions of asphodels where herds are at graze. From distance to distance, Arab encampments, black tents on the beautiful green of the herbage. Or perhaps fellah villages, with houses of greyish earth grouped about a little whitewashed dome, which is a holy tomb and serves them for protection.

Towards evening the sun, which has been very warm, becomes veiled little by little with mournful mists, till it seems no more than a pale white disk. And it is borne in upon us how far we have travelled already towards the north.

At the same time we leave behind us the plains of barley and enter upon a mountainous country. Soon the valley of Beït-Djibrin, where we count on spending the night, will open before us.

Truly a valley of the Promised Land, "flowing with milk and honey." Green it is, with the exquisite green of springtime, of a meadow in May, amid its hills, which olive-trees, vigorous

and superb, cover with another green, magnificently sombre. Underfoot the thickly growing herbage is speckled with red anemones, violet irises and pink cyclamen. The air is filled with the perfume of flowers, and in the centre of the valley gleams a little lake, where at this hour sheep and goats are drinking.

On one of the hills stands the little old Arab village to which the innumerable herds are brought for the night. While our camp is being set up, on the tall, flowered grass, there passes before us an endless procession of cattle and sheep, which climb to the enclosure of its earthen walls, conducted by long-robed, turbaned shepherds, like saints or prophets. A number of children follow, carrying tenderly in their arms the new-born lambs. The last that come to plunge themselves into the narrow streets of dried mud are many hundreds of black goats, which make their way in a compact mass, like a long unbroken trail, of the colour and sheen of a raven. Truly it is amazing what this hamlet of Beït-Djibrin is able to hold ! And as all these beasts pass, a wholesome odour of the stable mingles with the perfume of the peaceful countryside.

The pastoral life of olden times is still to be found here—the life of the Bible, in all its grandeur and simplicity.

CHAPTER III

AT about two o'clock in the morning, when the night casts its darkest shadow over this country of trees and herbage, the sound of voices singing, very plaintively, very softly, issues from Beït-Djibrin, passes over us, and dies away in the distance of the sleeping and fragrant fields : an exalted call to prayer, reminding men of their nothingness and their death. The muezzins are shepherds standing on their earthen roofs, and they sing all together in a kind of perpetual fugue ; and always it is the name of Allah, the name of Mahomet, surprising and gloomy, here, in this land of the Bible and of Christ. . . .

We awaken in the early morning, at the hour when the flocks leave the village to scatter over the meadows. The rain, the beneficent rain unknown to the desert, patters on our tents, watering plentifully this Eden of verdure in which we are.

The Sheik of the valley comes to visit us, and excuses himself for having been detained last evening in distant pastures where his sheep were folded. We ascend to the village with

him, despite the unceasing rain, walking through the tall, drenched grass, through the irises and anemones, which bend beneath the sweep of our burnouses.

In this country, in the neighbourhood of ancient Gaza and of ancient Hebron, Beït-Djibrin, which is scarcely more than two thousand years old, may be regarded as a town almost of yesterday. It was the Bethogabris of Ptolemy, the Eleutheropolis of Septimus Severus, and in the time of the Crusades it became an episcopal see. To-day the implacable prophecies of the Bible have been accomplished and, like all the towns of Palestine and Idumea, its desolation is without end, under a marvellous carpet of wild flowers. No more than a few shepherds' huts, a few stables, the roofs of which are red with anemones ; these and the debris of formidable ramparts overthrown in the grass ; and, buried under earth and rubbish, under the medley of tall acanthi, of brambles and of asphodels, the vestiges of the cathedral where the Crusader bishops once officiated : columns of white marble with Corinthian capitals, a nave in its last stage of dilapidation and ruin, sheltering some Bedouins and their goats.

It is still early when we mount our horses to begin our day's journey. The sky is overcast and threatening, but the rain has ceased.

Following a rising slope towards the high plateaux of Judæa, we make our way till mid-day by flowery pathways, amid fields of barley, between rows of hills crowned with woods of olive-trees, their branches grey, their foliage dark.

As in the desert it is during the midday halt that the caravan of our baggage and tents overtakes us. But now it is a very different caravan : along little green roads, a cortège of mules led by Syrians of open countenance and stepping to the tintinnabulation of the little bells of their collars ; leading them, the *Captain Mule*, the handsomest of the band and the most intelligent, harnessed with embroideries of beads and shells and wearing on its neck the large guiding bell which all the others hear and follow.

In proportion as we ascend, the slopes become steeper and more rocky ; the barley-fields give place definitively to brambles and asphodels.

At about three o'clock, in debouching from a deep gorge, which for a long time had kept us confined, we discover suddenly that we command unexpected immensities. Behind us and below us, the plains of Gaza, the magnificent plains of barley, unified in the distance so that they look like a green sea ; and beyond them, infinitely beyond them, a little of that desert

from which we have lately come, appearing to us now for the last time, in a vague rose-coloured deployment. In front of us a very different region is disclosed. Up to the cloudy summits of Moab which bar the sky, there rises what seems a country of grey stones, laboured over in its whole extent by the hand of man, where little walls, regularly placed, follow one above another as far as eye can see : they are the staged vineyards of Hebron, reproduced century after century in the same places since the days of the Bible.

They are leafless, these vineyards, for April has not yet begun ; their enormous vines twist promiscuously over the ground like multiple-bodied serpents ; and they do not change the general colour of the scene. It is a mournful country that is before us, a country of stones, a country of uniform greyness, with scarce a solitary olive-tree here and there to show its little tuft of black foliage.

In the distance our pathway leads to what looks like a long white ribbon : a road, forsooth ! —a veritable carriage road as in Europe, with its stoning and its dust. And along it at this moment two carriages are passing ! We stare with the astonishment of savages.

It is the road leading from Jerusalem and we, in turn, are about to follow it. It descends

towards Hebron, between countless little walls enclosing vineyards and fig-trees. And when all is said there is something of comfort in the facility it affords, after the endless stones and sharp rocks and slippery slopes and dangerous quagmires amid which for more than a month we have had to keep a constant eye on the feet of our mounts.

Two more wagonettes pass us, filled with the noisy tourists of the agencies: men in sun helmets, stout women in otter caps and green veils. We were not prepared for such an encounter; and our mental reverie, our religious dream, is more than ever disconcerted. Oh, their bearing, their noisy chatter, their laughter on this holy ground to which we have come, humbly pensive, by the old road of the prophets!

Happily they are going away, these wagonettes; they are even in a hurry to be gone before nightfall, for Hebron is still without hotels; it remains indeed one of the most fanatical of the Mussulman towns of Palestine and will scarcely consent to lodge a Christian under its roofs.

Amid stony hills, covered with a succession of terraces for the vines, Hebron begins to appear, Hebron, built with the same materials

as the endless walls with which the country is filled. In a land of grey stones, a town of grey stones; a super-imposition of cubes of stone, each having by way of roof a vault of stones, and all alike, all pierced with the same tiny arched windows joined together in pairs. The general effect is clean-cut and hard, with a surprising uniformity of outline and colour. Dominating the whole are five or six minarets.

Following the custom, we encamp by the roadside at the entrance to the town, at a spot where a few olive-trees grow. Our belled mules having got but a little way ahead of us to-day, we preside ourselves at the unpacking of our travellers' baggage, in the midst of a crowd of onlookers, Mussulmans and Jews, silent in long robes.

When our tents are set up, there still remains to us an hour of daylight. The sun, very low in the heavens, gilds at this moment the grey monotonies of Hebron and its neighbourhood, the mass of stone cubes that compose the town, the profusion of stone walls that cover the mountain.

We climb on foot to the great mosque, the impenetrable basements of which contain the authentic tombs of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob.

Arabs and Jews move in a crowd about the streets, and the colours of their garments stand out vividly against the neutral tint of the walls, which are without either paint or whitewash.

Some of the houses seem as old as the patriarchs ; others are new, only recently built ; but all are alike : the same massive walls, of a solidity to defy the centuries, the same cubical proportions and the same little windows always in pairs. In the whole, there is nothing out of keeping, and Hebron is one of those rare towns that are not marred by a building of modern or foreign appearance.

The bazaar, vaulted with stones, with only a few narrow and barred openings to let in the daylight, is already dark, and its shops are beginning to shut. On the shop-fronts are hung burnouses and robes, and harness and bead head-stalls for camels ; above all, quantities of that glassware—bracelets and necklaces—which has been made at Hebron from very remote times. One sees there confusedly, and walks in a cloud of dust, in an odour of spices and amber, slipping on old shining flagstones, that have been polished for centuries by Arab slippers and bare feet.

In the approaches to the Great Mosque we encounter for a few moments the darkness of night, in little ascending streets with arched

roofs, like narrow naves ; on to these passages open the doors of ancient houses, ornamented with the shapeless remains of inscriptions and carvings, and we brush in passing the monstrous basement stones which must date back to the times of the Hebrew kings. In this close of day, one feels that things here are as it were impregnated with incalculable dead ; one realises, in a way that is almost agonising, how the centuries have been heaped up on this town, which was concerned in the events of sacred history from the legendary origins of Israel. What revelations of past times might be surrendered by this ancient soil, if everything was not so closed, so impenetrable, so hostile !

And after this Abraham buried Sara his wife in the double cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre: the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan (Genesis, xxiii. 19).

We regain the golden light of the evening when, in issuing from the darkness of the little vaulted streets, we reach the foot of the Mosque of Abraham. The mosque is situated half-way up the hill, which has been deeply cut to receive it. It guards under its grim shadow the mystery of that double cavern of Machpelah

where, for nearly four thousand years, the patriarch has slept with his sons.

This is the cavern that was bought, for four hundred shekels of silver, from Ephron the Hittite, son of Zohar! The Crusaders were the last to explore its depths and the most recent written description of it is that of Antony the Martyr (sixth century). To-day entrance to it is forbidden even to Mussulmans. To Christians and Jews the mosque itself is proscribed; influence, stratagem, gold, are powerless to gain them admittance to it—and when, some twenty years ago, it was opened for the Prince of Wales, on a formal order from the Sultan, the population of Hebron was on the point of armed revolt.

All that is allowed to visitors is to make the circuit of the holy place, by a kind of roundway flanked by high walls. The whole lower part of the monument consists of gigantic stones, of cyclopean appearance, and was built by King David, in order to honour with fitting magnificence the tomb of the father of the Hebrews; this first enclosure, of a durability well-nigh eternal, was about two thousand years old when the Arabs added to its height the embattled wall of the mosque of to-day, which itself is now so old.

Almost on a level with the ground there is a



MOSQUE AT HEBRON.

fissure through which Christians and Jews are allowed to pass their heads so that, crawling, they may kiss the holy stones. And this evening some poor Israelite pilgrims are there, prostrate, stretching out their necks like foxes running to earth, in an effort to touch with their lips the tomb of their ancestor; while Arab children, charming and mocking, who are allowed within the enclosure, watch them with a smile of high disdain. The sides and approaches of this hole have been rubbed in the course of centuries by so many hands, so many heads, by the hair of so many heads, that they have taken on a shiny and greasy polish. For that matter all the great stones of this enclosure of David's shine thus, as if they were oily, from the continual contact of humanity; for this place is one of the most ancient of those still venerated by mankind, and there has never been a time when men have ceased to come and pray here.

The roundway, as it ascends the hill, passes at a given point above the sanctuary; and from there, between the sacred walls, one can see the three minarets which mark the resting-places of the three patriarchs; the minaret in the middle, which, it seems, surmounts the tomb of Abraham, is as shapeless as a rock from the accumulated layers of whitewash, and is topped by a gigantic bronze crescent.

Here then is "the field before Mamre." The outline, almost immutable, of the hills opposite, can scarcely have changed since the day when Abraham bought this place of sepulture from Ephron, the son of Zohar. The scene of the purchase (Genesis, xxiii. 16) and of the burying of the patriarch (Genesis, xxv. 9) might almost be reconstituted from what happens in our days among the grave and simple shepherds of the country hereabout. Abraham must have been very like these chiefs of the valley of Beït-Djibrin or of the plains of Gaza. All the stupendous duration of the past vanishes now like a vapour ; we feel, behind us, reascending from the abyss, the days of the Bible, in the light of the dying day. . . .

"Bury me with my fathers in the double cave that is in the field of Ephron, the Hittite," asked Jacob, dying in the land of Egypt. "There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife ; there they buried Isaac and Rebecca his wife ; and there I buried Leah " (Genesis, xlix. 29, 31).

And this surely is a thing unique in the annals of the dead : this sepulchre, originally so simple, which reunited them all, has never ceased, at any epoch of history, to be venerated—while the most sumptuous tombs of Egypt and Greece have long since been profaned and empty. And it seems probable, too, that the

patriarchs will continue to sleep in peace for many centuries to come, respected by millions of Christians, and Mussulmans, and Jews.

The twilight still lingers when we reach our tents by the roadside. And presently there file past us all that return from the fields for the night : labourers, tall and handsome of bearing in their archaic draperies ; shepherds, quaintly mounted on the extreme hindquarters of their very undersized donkeys ; beasts of burden and flocks of every sort, most numerous of all the black goats, their long ears almost trailing in the dust.

Opposite to us, on the other side of the road, gushes a spring, apparently of great sanctity, for a crowd of men and little children flock to it, with long prostrations, to offer up their evening prayer.

A night of noise as at Gaza ; barkings of wandering dogs ; tinklings of the bells of our mules ; neighings of our horses, tethered to olive-trees hard by our tents—and from the height of the mosques, distant and soft-sounding chants, which the inspired muezzins let fall upon the earth.

CHAPTER IV

Wednesday, 28th March.

AT the fresh morning hour when the shepherds of Hebron lead out their flocks to the fields, we are up and about. The camp struck, we mount our horses, in the midst of a black sea of goats and kids that are about to scatter far and wide over the stony hillsides.

It is a clear peaceful morning, fragrant with mint and other wild scents. We make our way absent-mindedly, having for the moment lost all notion of locality, towards Bethlehem. The country resembles certain arid regions of Provence or of Italy, save for its thousands of little walls, enclosing vineyards or slender olive-trees. And then there is this carriage road which confuses our ideas; we have not had time since yesterday to become accustomed to it. Finally there is the pretence of our Arab costumes, which we wear to-day for the last time—they mystify two parties of tourists making their way to Hebron: for while they are staring at us as if we were great sheiks, their Syrian guide explains that we are *Moghrebis*—that is to say, men from that vague

Moghreb (Occident) which, for the Arabs of Palestine, begins in Egypt and ends in Morocco. On this side of the desert, indeed, the long veils of white wool in which we are enveloped are not worn, and are an immediate indication of distinguished pilgrims from the west.

Our meditation, fostered in the preceding solitudes, is disturbed for the moment by the sight of these latter-day travellers and their wagonettes. Awakened from our dream that was at once simple and sublime, fallen from a great height, we have become simply Cook's tourists, with the aggravation that, out of some childish fancy which irks us all at once, we are disguised.

Nevertheless, the country little by little resumes its air of special and strangely profound melancholy. The vineyards, the olives, the little walls have disappeared ; nothing now but brambles and stones, with here and there stray daffodils and patches of red anemones and pink cyclamen. The sky is veiled with a pearly grey mist, first of all very slight and transparent, but gradually thickening, so that the light grows dull. The hour is past for meeting the tourists who are "doing" Hebron to-day, and we encounter no more than some files of slow-moving camels, and groups of Arabs

on horseback, handsome and grave, who exchange salaams with us.

The light continues to diminish, under the thickening haze, which is not a cloud, nor an ordinary mist, nor a vapour, but something altogether peculiar, as if it might be the envelope of saintly visions.

At wide intervals, some great ruin, mutilated, incomprehensible, upright and tall, gazes far and wide over the mournful abandonment of this Judæa which once upon a time was the cynosure of nations.

Now, nothing but stones; the last of the brambles have disappeared; a soil literally consisting of stones, out of which mighty blocks emerge, now upright, now overthrown. And so old is the land that one can scarcely distinguish the real rocks from the debris of human buildings, the remains of churches and fortresses, of funerary mounds and tombs that are made one with the mountain. From distance to distance, half stopped up, half buried, open the doors of sepulchres, hard by the side of this road—which we follow pensive and once more meditative, in measure as the time passes, penetrated with I know not what quite indescribable awe at the approach to these places that still are called Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

Ever more desolate, and more solitary,

Palestine unfolds itself, infinitely silent. Except for this excellently levelled road, we might almost be in the desert once more—a desert of stones and cyclamen, less brilliantly light and more northerly than the one we have recently left. And ever the great shapeless ruins, vestiges of temples, last remains of walls that were part of churches in the times of the Crusades, survey the vast and mournful campaign, marvelling to see it to-day so abandoned ; witnesses of the ages of faith that are for ever dead, they seem to be waiting for some summons that shall bring back the nations and their armies to the Holy Land. But those times have gone by for ever and the eyes of men are directed now towards the countries of the west and north, where the new ages are beginning, fearful and chilling ; and these ruins here will never be rebuilt ; and no one will come any more to Palestine, save some last pilgrims, rare and solitary, and in addition perhaps a certain select few of curious idlers, worse profaners than Saracens or Bedouins.

The kind of vast mist with which the air is filled continues to obscure the sun, which soon will be no longer visible ; it veils distant things in a strange effacement. The stony hills, of the same violet-grey as the sky this morning, follow one another in an ascending succession,

but with rounded silhouettes always alike, with softened outlines in which nothing catches the eye—as if they were clouds. In the valleys and on the summits the soil is alike, a uniform layer of exfoliated stones spotted with myriads of little holes, which recall the colour and marking of the bark of cork-trees. And all around it is the same, under the veil of this persistent vapour, which thickens from hour to hour. A sky of pearl-grey and a country of pearl-grey, without a tree, in the monotony of which the little huts of the shepherds and the ruins, very few and far between, make spots of a more roseate grey.

As, through this twilight of eclipse, we draw near to the holy places, our minds are filled with a kind of anxious anticipation. A whole past, our whole childhood, and a whole atavism of faith live again in our hearts as we make our way without speaking, our heads bowed, our eyes fixed on the eternal little flowers of Oriental spring that border the road, cyclamen, anemones and daisies.

Becoming higher still, the mountains now hold us in a deeper shadow; the mists of varying transparency augment them, change their proportions; a vast silence reigns in this deepest of these stony valleys, where there is no sound save the tramp of our horses.

And all at once, very high in front of us, on the summit of one of the most distant of the pearl-grey mountains, appears a little pinkish-grey town, vague of colour and outline, like a town of dreams, seeming to be almost too high up above the low regions in which we are ; cubes of rose-coloured stone, with minarets of mosques and steeples of churches—and our guide with his indolent Arab gesture points to it and says : “ Bethlehem ! ”

Bethlehem ! There is still such magic in the name as to blur our vision. I rein in my horse so as to drop behind, for tears come into my eyes as I contemplate the sudden apparition ; seen from the depth of our ravine of shadow, raised high amid those cloud-like mountains, it calls to us like a supreme fatherland. One would not have imagined these tears, which yet are sovereign and not to be denied, infinitely desolate and yet strangely soothing too, a last prayer, beyond all utterance, a last homage of remembrance, at the feet of the Comforter we have lost.

We are going to make the midday halt in a valley, near the reservoirs of King Solomon, and it will be about three o'clock before we enter Bethlehem, which has now disappeared, hidden by a fold of the mountain.

In a valley, mournful and abandoned as is the whole of Palestine, we come upon these reservoirs, sumptuous basins that formerly supplied the summer palace of Ecclesiastes. In the thousands of years that have elapsed, everything has disappeared, the palaces, the gardens, the trees, and round about there is nothing but a desert of stones and daffodils.

A large imposing ruin stands still, however, close to the reservoirs ; a square of embattled Saracen walls, flanked, at its four angles, with heavy towers likewise embattled. Under the pale sun of midday, which scarcely penetrates the lilac-grey of the mist, two of its sides are rose-coloured and the other two—those in the shadow—bluish. Its formidable battlements outline their rows of points against the sky. Breached and cracked, alone, mournful, immense and tall in this bare country, it is a citadel of the great Saladin, built here many centuries after the destruction of the palace of Ecclesiastes, and now destroyed in its turn. A little Arab, quite a child, perched on a dromedary, who issues from this fortress by a monumental archway, gives us a respectful salaam, as to sheiks of the Moghreb—and we choose a place for ourselves and our horses, in the shade of the great walls.

Soon two other groups come and sit down in

the same shade, ranging themselves along the formidable walls : four Greek priests, on an archæological excursion, who make a frugal luncheon on the grass, and some Maronite women, come down from Bethlehem with their children, who have brought nargilehs and oranges.

What a dull and singular sun to-day in this Eastern sky, and how melancholy the place seems !

While we are resting, we hear the frogs singing of the spring, singing lustily, in the cisterns of Ecclesiastes. We bend over the venerable old parapet to look at them : monstrous frogs, as large as an outspread hand, which make the stoutest reeds bend beneath their weight.

It is about three o'clock, and the sun, which has at last emerged from the morning mists, has become very warm, when, by a dusty road, we reach Bethlehem.

While our camp is being got ready at the entrance of the town, and by the side of the road, as the custom is, in one of those enclosures of olive-trees that are abandoned to passing travellers, we make our way on horseback into the streets of the town.

Nothing of the first impression remains, needless to say ; that was not terrestrial and

has gone for ever. But Bethlehem is still, at least in certain quarters, a town of the old East in which there is much that is interesting to be seen.

As at Hebron, cubes of stones, vaulted with stones, and looking as if they had no roof. Passages, narrow and dark, where our horses slip on the large, shining paving stones. High blunt walls that seem to be as old as Herod. In these walls a few, a very few, little arched windows. "Ah! Moghrebis!" say the Syrians sitting in their doorways, as they watch us coming. Between the houses we get glimpses of the other slope of this mountain on which the town is built, and there there are gardens and orchards without end, arranged in terraces one above another.

The beauty and costume of the women constitute the special charm of Bethlehem. Pink and white, with regular features and eyes of black velvet, they wear a tall rigid headdress, spangled with silver or gold, which is something like the hennin of our Middle Ages, and covering this a veil *à la vierge* of white muslin, which falls in ample religious folds. The sleeves of their jackets, which are usually of some striking colour and covered with old-fashioned embroideries, are cut short above the elbow so as to display the very long pagoda sleeves,

tapering to the wrist after the fashion of our fifteenth century, of the under robe, which falls straight to the feet and is generally of a dark green. In these costumes of past ages they move about, slow, upright, noble—and, with it all, very simply pretty all of them, under the whiteness of these veils which accentuate *a strange resemblance*, especially when they carry in their arms a little child : one might imagine, at each turning of the dark old streets, that he saw appearing the Virgin Mary, such as she is shown to us in the pictures of our Primitives.

Some wagonettes of Messrs Cook's, some hackney carriages full of tourists, to make way for which we have to draw aside into the doorways. An odious signboard in French : “ So and So, maker of objects of piety at moderate prices.” And at length we dismount in the main square of Bethlehem, which is enclosed beyond by the severe walls of the Church of the Nativity. There are hotels, restaurants, shops with European fronts, full of rosaries. There is a stand for hackney carriages and a quantity of those beings, of a quite special effrontery, whose business it is to exploit the traveller.

Visitors are admitted in little groups and in turn to the Church and Cave of the Nativity,

which adjoin a large Franciscan monastery, the good monks of which act as guides to the holy places.

The monks who receive us there are Italians, common in speech and gesture. They bid us be seated in a waiting-room and leave us there alone. A dining-table fills the middle of the room; it is covered with a coarse oilcloth and decorated with empty wine and beer glasses. On the walls a number of "chromos" representing anything you please—Queen Victoria, I think, and the Emperor of Austria. Where have we got to, indeed—into what tavern, into what bar-parlour? We had been warned, we were prepared for signs of profanation, but not for this. The name of Bethlehem, once so radiant, has fallen pitiably at our feet and our disillusion is complete; everything is swallowed up in a mortal cold. . . . We wait there silent and grim, utterly sad, indignant and sick at heart. Oh, why did we come; why did we not depart at once, return to the desert, this morning, when, from the depth of the low-lying valley, Bethlehem, still mysterious and pleasing, appeared to us?

It is now our turn to visit. We are called, we are about to be conducted to the grotto where Christ was born.

Passing through the cloisters we meet people

returning, some Russian pilgrims, whose eyes, it is true, are filled with tears, but especially chattering tourists carrying their Baedekers. Good Lord ! is it possible that these things should be ? That this place, prostituted to all, is the Church of Bethlehem ?

The church is threefold, Latin, Armenian and Greek ; its three parts, distinct and hostile, are inter-communicating, but an officer and some Turkish soldiers, always armed, walk to and fro from one to another, to maintain order and to prevent conflicts between the Christians of different rites.

The grotto is underneath, entirely below ground to-day. And probably it is indeed, as the traditions of the second century attest, the birthplace of Christ, for in olden times, situated as it was at the entrance to Bethlehem, it served to shelter the poor travellers who were not able to secure a place in the inn.

Two staircases descend to it, one for the Latins and Armenians, the other for the Greeks. Its narrow doorway is of white marble. All its walls are soiled and worn from contact with the thousands of beings who have visited it, in groups or in procession, since the early days of Christianity. It consists of a number of little compartments, of little recesses, each with

its altar and burning lamp. The irregular vault of the rock, damp and dripping, appears here and there, between the hangings of faded damask ; the place abounds in tawdry gilding, in little pictures, in vulgar "chromos." We had expected at least that we should see an archaic luxury and splendour of heaped-up gold, as in the crypt of Sinai ; but no, nothing ; Bethlehem has been pillaged and re-pillaged so many times that everything there is poor, ugly, not even old. "Here, the Child was born," the monk explains ; "here He was laid in the manger ; here the three wise men knelt ; here stood the ass and the ox. . . ." Absently, with mind shut and heart dead, we hear him without listening, impatient to get away.

Above the grotto the three churches, where the services and chants proceed side by side, according to the diverse rites and in the rivalry of neighbourhood, are commonplace and uninteresting. In the Greek church, before the antique golden tabernacle, a furtive religious impression, half pagan, arrests us for a moment : a very old pope is there, chanting very rapidly in a high nasal voice, amid a cloud of incense, and the congregation, at each verse, kneels and stands up : women of Bethlehem, wearing, all of them, over the spangled hennin, the long veil *à la vierge* ; converted Arabs with eyes of

simple faith, bowing their turbans to the ground. We make our way out by a fourth church, splendid this one and the most venerable of them all, but empty, neglected, serving as a vestibule to the others. This is the basilica begun by St Helena and completed about the year 330 by the Emperor Constantine. Here, eight centuries later, on Christmas Day 1101, Baldwin the First was consecrated King of Jerusalem. It is one of the oldest Christian sanctuaries in the world. It is two centuries older than the basilica of Sinai. Spared by Saladin and all the Arab conquerors, miraculously preserved from the destructions of other days, it suffered no real damage till the beginning of the nineteenth century; when our modern Greeks walled up its choir in order to make their paltry little church of to-day. It is of a simple and elegant grandeur; preserving something of ancient Greece, with its quadruple row of slender Corinthian columns; and above the capitals of acanthus leaves, the walls of the naves still preserve some part of the coating of gold mosaic that was put there, at the end of the twelfth century, at the instance of "the Lord Amaury, Great King of Jerusalem." The incense from the neighbouring sanctuaries perfumes it discreetly, and the sound of the chants is diminished to a murmur.

There is now nothing more to see that interests us in this profaned Bethlehem and we long to get away from it. In the square we remount our horses in order to regain our tents, escaping from the vendors of crucifixes and rosaries who pluck at our burnouses, escaping too from the professional guides who follow us offering their cards. And thus we depart, carrying with us bitter regret that we ever came, feeling at the bottom of our hearts the chill of irreparable disillusion.

But in the limpid twilight of the evening, as in thoughtful mood, before our tents, we lean, as on a terrace, against the little wall that separates our enclosure of olives from the road, the impression of the place in which we are slowly gains upon us again.

A little distance away, on our right, the first houses of Bethlehem, square and without visible roof, alone suffice to proclaim Judæa. Below us, a vast panorama, descending first of all into a deep valley and then ascending again, in the distance, to a great height by a succession of ranging mountains; an immense campaign, peaceful, melancholy, of olive-trees and stones, especially of stones, grey stones the pale colours of which seem vaporous as the daylight fails. And overlooking all, at an immeasurable distance, the great

bluish line of the mountains of Moab, which are on the further bank of the Black Sea.

On all sides one hears the little bells of the flocks returning from the fields, and in the distance the bells of the monasteries.

And now the flocks begin to come. As they pass before us with their shepherds they make a procession almost Biblical, stretching there under our eyes, in the gradually failing light.

There pass, too—an unexpected vision this—some fifty children, dancing, and singing that old song of France : “ *Au clair de la lune . . . prête moi ta plume.* ” It is the Christian school returning from a walk : fifty little converted Arabs, dressed in the fashion of Europe. The Brothers who have charge of them sing the same air, and dance it too. It is all very strange, but it is innocent and strikes a joyful note.

Then again comes the more solemn, more archaic procession of the flocks and shepherds.

The details of the countryside wide outspread before us are confused in the gathering twilight. Soon the great lines of the horizon will alone remain, the same, immutably the same, as in the time of the Crusades and in the time of Christ. And it is there, in these aspects of eternity, that the Great Remembrance still endures.

Bethlehem ! Bethlehem ! The name begins

again to sing itself in the depths of our frozen hearts. And, in the gloom, the ages seem silently to roll backwards on their course, drawing us with them.

Along the road the labourers and shepherds are still passing, antique silhouettes against the immense backgrounds of the valleys and the mountains. All the workers of the fields continue to wend their way towards the town. Claspings their children in their arms, or perhaps carrying them, in Egyptian fashion, sitting on their shoulder, the women of Bethlehem, with their long veils, their long sleeves, pass slowly by.

Bethlehem ! The name sings itself now everywhere, in our hearts and in our mournful surroundings, to the chirping of the crickets, to the tinkling of the bells of the flocks, to the tolling of the church bells ; time seems to have moved back eighteen hundred years.

And now it seems that the Virgin Mary herself is coming towards us, with the infant Jesus in her arms. A few yards away she stops and leans against the trunk of an olive, her eyes cast down, in the calm and beautiful attitude of the Madonna : a woman quite young, with regular features, clothed in blue and pink under a long white veil. Other holy women follow her, tranquil and noble in their flowing robes,

coiffed also in hennin and veil. They form an ideal group, which the setting sun illumines with a last fleeting light. They talk smilingly to our humble muleteers, offering them water for us in amphoræ, and oranges in baskets.

Under the magic of the evening, as a feeling of charmed serenity takes gradual possession of us, we find ourselves becoming very indulgent, accepting and excusing all that had at first revolted us. After all, the profanations, the innocent little barbarisms of the Crypt, we ought surely to have expected them and not to have looked down upon them from the height of our sophisticated disdain. The multitudinous little chapels, the gildings and the crude pictures, the rosaries, the candles, the crucifixes—all these things charm and console the simple multitude, to whom as well as to the rest of us Jesus brought immortal hope. We who have learnt to regard Christ only in the light of the gospels have formed a picture of Him perhaps a little clearer than have these pilgrims, who kneel in the Grotto before the little lamps of its altars; but the great mystery of His teaching and His mission is hardly less impenetrable to us than to them. The least of His doctrines is as inadmissible to our human reason as the efficacy of medals and scapulars. By what right then can we presume to despise these simple

tokens that seem to us so poor ? Behind them, very far behind them—separated from them, if you will, by abysmal distances—there is always Christ, unexplained and ineffable, He who suffered the simple and little children to come unto Him, who if He saw approaching these half-idolatrous faithful, these peasants that have flocked to Bethlehem from the far distances of Russia, with their candles and their tear-filled eyes, would welcome them with outstretched arms.

With a more impartial tenderness now we contemplate this Church of the Nativity, this place unique in all the world, filled eternally with the perfume of incense and the rhythmic murmur of prayers.

Bethlehem ! Bethlehem ! A night more peaceful than other places know broods over us now ; everything is silent, the sounds of voices, of the church bells, of the little bells of the flocks have ceased ; an infinite stillness reigns, and a hymn of silence ascends from the ancient countryside, from the depths of the stony valleys, towards the stars of the firmament.

CHAPTER V

Thursday, 29th March.

THE day of our entry into Jerusalem—a day to which we have looked forward, a little like the pilgrims of olden days, during forty days of the desert.

At sunrise a terrible wind awakens us. Had it not been for the olives around us our tents would already have been blown away.

Hurriedly we arise and dress, have our tents taken down and folded, our baggage packed and corded; and soon we are ready, on the stony ground of the olive-yard, by the side of the road, on a cold and desolate morning. Then in much disorder we mount our horses two hours earlier than we had intended and go to seek some more secure shelter in the Holy City.

The sun rises, pale and ominously yellow, a sun of storm, amid threatening clouds, behind upheavals of dust and sand.

The wind blows harder and harder. Everything seems to be caught up and carried away in a mad whirl.

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We travel for an hour in whirlwinds of dust

alternating with storms of rain, caught every now and then by squalls of wind which outspread our burnouses like wings, and throw back into our faces, like the lashing of whips, the manes of our horses.

Beyond, a large city is gradually revealed, on stony and mournful mountains—a collection of scattered buildings, convents and churches, of every style and every country; through the dust and the lashing rain it is not easy yet to distinguish it; and every now and then heavy clouds pass before it and hide it from our view.

On the left side of the mountain the buildings are nondescript and disappointing; but on the right the old Jerusalem endures still, such as we have seen it in the pictures of the simple missals; Jerusalem, recognisable from all other towns, with its formidable walls and its little cupola-ed roofs of stone; Jerusalem, gloomy and high, enclosed within its battlements, under a dark sky.

During a gust of wind more violent than the rest a train passes along the railway, whistles, frightens my horse and completes the confusion of my thoughts, which had already been a good deal disturbed by the wind.

We reach at length a deep hollow, at the foot of an ascending road, between the commonplace and pitiful mass of buildings which cover the

hill on the left—hotels, a station, factories—and the tenebrous embattled walls which cover the hill on the right. People of all nationalities encumber the approaches : Arabs, Turks, Bedouins ; but most numerous of all are white faces from the north, which we had not expected to see, long blond beards under fur caps, Russian pilgrims, poor moujiks clothed in rags.

And in the midst of this crowd we ascend towards the town, which now overhangs us with its towers, its battlements, its whole strangely mournful mass ; ascend by that glorious road of sieges and battles, where so many Crusaders must have fallen for the faith. There flashes across us at moments a comprehension of the place—and they are moments of deep emotion—but all that is furtive, confused, distracted by the noise of the wind, by the vicinity of the locomotives and the agencies. And when we reach the top and pass through the great arched gateway of Jerusalem we are reduced to a state of complete insensibility in our thoughtless haste to reach a shelter from the rain which now begins to fall fast, torrential and icy.

CHAPTER VI

Friday, 30th March.

RAIN, torrential and incessant, had held us prisoners throughout the whole of yesterday, from the time of our arrival until night.

And to-day it is raining again and the sky is gloomy. The impression of being in Jerusalem is obliterated in the banality of this tourists' hotel, where we are gathered about the fire, having resumed the clothes and manners of the West. Our recollection that yesterday we entered a gloomy city by an old Saracen gateway, on horses plagued by the wind, seems all a dream.

In a commonplace room, in company with American and English tourists, we glance at the pictures of the latest European papers, learning without interest the very insignificant things that have happened during the period of our travel. Meanwhile a number of Syrians, selling "articles of Jerusalem," bother us with objects of piety, in wood and mother-of-pearl. . . . Gethsemane, the Holy Sepulchre, Calvary, can it be that they are real, and near us, in this self-same town? We postpone our visit to

them till some later time, on account of the woeful sky, which shows no sign of clearing; besides, we are in no hurry and perhaps are unconsciously deterred by the fear of a supreme disillusion. . . .

In the evening, however, we leave the hotel for the first time. The Consul-General of France, M. L——, has come, with charming courtesy, to offer to escort us between two showers to the house of the Dominican Fathers who live not far away outside the walls, and who, he says, will no doubt consent at his request to be our guides, and very well-informed guides at that, in the Holy City.

We pass through a sort of suburb, as commonplace as the sitting-room of the hotel. The rain is now beginning again to streak it with fine grey hatching.

During a fair interval we pass the Damascus Gate, which delights us. It is at once the grimmest and the most exquisite of the Saracen gateways, outlining its ogive in the great sombre wall. It is flanked by two gloomy towers and is crowned, bristles indeed, with points of stone, sharpened like lance heads. High and mysterious, it has taken on to-day, under the shine of the trickling water, an intense colour of old bronze stained with verdigris. In front of it,

looking very low at its foot, are some blackish Bedouin tents. And behind it appears a corner of ancient Jerusalem : an angle of embattled ramparts, enclosing cupola-ed houses, juts out, under the rainy sky, into the desert of stones which here is the countryside. The whole is of the same greenish bronze tint as the gate itself. And it all looks prodigiously old, abandoned and dead. But it is the real Jerusalem, the Jerusalem that we have seen of old in pictures and prints ; and coming across it after the horrible new suburb with its smoking factory chimneys, it seems a holy vision.

The White Dominicans receive us in the little parlour of their monastery. They have the detached serenity peculiar to religious ; one feels from the start that they belong to a better world and, presently, that they are learned.

In their garden, whither they lead us in the first lull of the conversation, they have been carrying out excavations and have discovered very interesting ruins. The soil of Jerusalem, dug and dug again so often in the times of the sieges, assaults and destructions, is still full of debris and unknown documents.

Some three hundred yards from the Damascus Gate, St Stephen was put to death in the fields, and the Empress Eudoxia, in order to consecrate

the place of his martyrdom, had a church built there. Working on this information, the monks, in the course of excavation, have come upon the remains of this church, its beautiful mosaic flooring still intact, and the bases of its marble columns, broken off a foot from the ground. It was the terrible Khosroës, that great destroyer of Christians, who, about the middle of the seventh century, demolished this holy place. Close by are to be seen also the foundations of the more modest chapel which later on the Crusaders built to the memory of St Stephen. This chapel in its turn was razed to the ground when the Saracen avalanche again overwhelmed Jerusalem.

All these poor glorious debris are disclosed to us here, drenched with the rain, amid the rubbish of the recent digging, still mingled with the earth which for centuries had hidden and preserved them. And for a moment we are silent, thrilled with the sense of the accumulation of ages, of prodigious pasts.

Another shower comes, washing with its lavish waters the marble ruins, and the mosaics of the Empress Eudoxia. And we all run and take refuge in some tombs which the monks have also discovered beneath their garden : a veritable little subterranean necropolis, with multiple rows of sepulchres, where bones that are twice

a thousand years old are slowly crumbling. The Dominicans now bury there the dead of their community, poor troubled Christians of these later times, who thus will sleep by the side of their brethren of the first centuries.

At night the banality of the hotel again encompasses us. Over the fire, amid the illustrated papers, the tourists and the vendors of rosaries, we remember that little corner of Jerusalem which was disclosed to us by chance in the course of our first excursion, and our thoughts turn to the Holy Sepulchre and to Gethsemane, which are quite near us. We have lost two days already in this impressive neighbourhood, divided between the desire and the fear of seeing, held up by the mournful insistence of the rain, which seems to have come expressly to give us a pretext for delay.

CHAPTER VII

Saturday, 31st March.

THE rain seems to be stopping. The sky, which now shows some first blue patches, sheds its last drops disconsolately. It is damp and cold, and all the old walls drip with water.

On foot, with a casual Arab for a guide, I escape alone from the hotel and make my way at last to the Holy Sepulchre. It is in the direction opposite to that of the Dominicans, almost in the heart of Jerusalem, by little narrow and twisting streets, between walls that date back to the Crusades, windowless and roofless. Over the wet pavements, under a sky still dull, move the costumes of the East, Turks, Bedouins and Jews, and women draped like phantoms, the Mussulmans in dark veils, the Christians in white veils.

The city has remained Saracen. Absent-mindedly I perceive that we are passing through an Oriental bazaar, where the shops are occupied by turbaned sellers ; in the gloom of the little covered streets a file of enormous camels passes slowly, obliging us to take refuge in doorways. A moment later we have to make way for a

strange and long procession of Russian women, all sexagenarian at the least, who walk hurriedly, leaning on sticks ; old faded robes, old umbrellas, old fur cloaks, faces marked with fatigue and suffering and framed in black kerchiefs ; the whole dark-coloured and sad, in the midst of this bright Orient. Hurriedly they walk, their movements telling at one and the same time of over-excitement and exhaustion, jostling everything and seeing nothing, like somnambulists, their hypnotized eyes wide open in a celestial dream. They are followed by hundreds of moujiks, with the same ecstatic gaze, all of them old and sordid, with long grey beards, long grey hair escaping from their fur caps ; on many of the breasts are medals indicating old soldiers. . . . They had entered the Holy City yesterday and are returning now from their first visit to this place of adoration for which I, in my turn, am bound ; poor pilgrims, they, who arrive here in thousands, making their way on foot, sleeping under the stars in rain and snow, perishing from hunger and leaving their dead behind them on the road.

As we draw nearer to the sanctuary the little Oriental objects in the shops give place to objects of obscure Christian piety : rosaries in thousands, crosses, religious lamps, pictures and icons. And the crowd becomes denser,

and many other pilgrims, old moujiks, old matushkas, are standing about, buying humble little wooden rosaries, humble little penny crucifixes, which they will take away with them as ever-sacred relics.

At length, in a wall as old and worn as a rock, there opens a gateway, very narrow, very low, and descending a flight of steps we reach a kind of square, overshadowed by high sombre walls, and facing us is the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre.

In this square it is the custom to uncover as soon as the Holy Sepulchre comes in view ; one walks there bare-headed, even if one is only going to cross on the way to some other part of Jerusalem. It is encumbered with poor of both sexes, singing and begging ; with praying pilgrims ; with sellers of crucifixes and rosaries, who spread out their little wares on the ground, on the old worn and venerable flagstones. Amid the flagstones, on the steps, still solidly stand the basements of columns which formerly supported the basilicas, and which were demolished, like those of the Church of St Stephen, in far-off and doubtful epochs. This city, which has been twenty times besieged, which has been sacked by every form of fanaticism, seems one vast accumulation of debris.

The high walls, of reddish brown stone, which

form the sides of the square, are convents and chapels—and they look like fortresses. At the far end, higher and more gloomy than all, rises the crumbling and broken mass of the façade of the Holy Sepulchre, which has taken on the appearance and the irregularity of a rock. It has two enormous doors of the twelfth century, framed with ornaments of a strange archaism; one is walled up; the other, wide open, discloses in the darkness of the interior thousands of little flames. Chantings, cries, discordant lamentations, mournful to listen to, issue from it, mingled with the perfume of incense.

Passing through the door, one is in the age-old gloom of a kind of vestibule, disclosing immense depths, in which innumerable lamps are burning. Some Turkish guards, armed as for a massacre, are in military occupation of this entrance. Seated in sovereignty on a large divan, they watch the people pass, watch the worshippers of this place, which in their eyes is the abiding shame of Mussulman Jerusalem; which the more fanatical among them indeed have not ceased to call: *El Komamah* (the dunghill).

The impression one receives, entering there for the first time, can scarcely be imagined and can never be forgotten. A labyrinth of gloomy sanctuaries, of all epochs and of all styles,



FORECOURT OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE.

communicating with one another by bays and porticoes and superb colonnades—and sometimes by obscure little doorways, by air-holes, by openings that might be the mouths of caves. Some of these sanctuaries are upraised from the ground, like high galleries, and in their dim recesses one can see groups of women in long veils; others are subterranean, and in them one rubs shoulders with shadows, between walls of native rock, oozing and black. And all this in semi-darkness, save for a few great shafts of light which accentuate the neighbouring obscurity; all this starred infinitely with the little flames of the gold and silver lamps which hang in thousands from the vaults. And everywhere crowds, now moving confusedly as in some Babel, now standing, almost in national groups, before some golden tabernacle where a service is proceeding.

Litanies and lamentations and songs of joy fill the high vaults, or resound, sepulchrally resonant, from below. The nasal intonations of the Greeks are broken into by the bellowings of the Copts. And in all these voices there is an exaltation of tears and prayer which subdues their dissonances and makes them one; so that the whole effect is indescribably wonderful, as if from this spot rose the great lament of mankind, the supreme cry of their distress in the moment of death.

In the middle of the lofty-domed rotunda into which one comes on entering, and from which, between its columns, one may divine the dark confusion of the other sanctuaries, is the great marble kiosk, of a half-barbarous splendour, overcharged with silver lamps, which encloses the stone of the Sepulchre. About this kiosk of utmost sanctity the crowd gathers, partly stationary, partly in motion. On the one side, some hundreds of moujiks and matushkas, on their knees on the stones; on the other, the women of Jerusalem, upright in long veils—groups of antique virgins they seem, in this twilight of dreams; and, beside them, Abyssinians, turbaned Arabs, prostrate, their foreheads on the ground; and Turks, sabre in hand—people of every communion, of every language.

It is not usual to linger in the stifling retreat of the Holy Sepulchre, which is as it were the very heart of this mass of basilicas and chapels; but to pass through it one by one. You have to stoop to enter the tiny doorway of carved and festooned marble which leads to it. The Sepulchre is within, enshrined in marble, in the midst of golden icons and golden lamps. Passing through, at the same time as I, are a Russian soldier, a poor old woman in rags, and an Oriental woman richly garbed in brocade; all are weeping

as they kiss the covering of the tomb. And others follow, others follow eternally, touching, kissing, moistening with their tears, these self-same stones.

There is no general plan in the medley of churches and chapels which huddle about the sacred shrine ; some are large and of marvellous richness ; others quite small, humble and primitive, dying of age, in gloomy little corners, fashioned out of the rock itself and dark as night. And, here and there, the rock of Calvary, left bare, appears amid the splendour and the archaic gilding. The contrast is strange between all this accumulated treasure—icons of gold, crosses of gold, lamps of gold—and the rags of the pilgrims, and the dilapidation of the walls and the pillars, worn, defaced, shapeless, stained from the constant rubbing of human hands.

The various altars of the different confessions are so mingled here that there are continual shiftings of priests and their attendants. They cleave a way through the crowd, carrying monstrances and preceded by armed janissaries, who strike the resonant flagstones with the pummels of their halberds. Make way ! It is the Latins passing, in golden chasubles. . . . Make way again ! It is the bishop of the Syrians, a long white beard beneath a black cagoule,

issuing from his little subterranean chapel. . . . Or, again, it is the Greeks in attire still Byzantine, or the black-avised Abyssinians. . . . Hurriedly they pass in their sumptuous vestments—while before them, swung by little acolytes, the silver thuribles strike against the crowd, which gives way hurriedly. In this human sea there is a kind of continuous murmur, accompanied by the unceasing sound of the psalmodies and the little sacred bells. And in almost all parts of the building it is so dark that to move about one has to carry a candle ; and beneath the tall columns, in the tenebrous galleries, a thousand little flames follow and pass one another. Men are praying aloud, are weeping, sobbing ; passing from one chapel to another, they kiss here the rock in which the cross was fixed, and bow down there on the spot where Mary and Magdalen wept. Priests, hidden in the shadow, beckon you to follow them through little gloomy doors into the cavities of tombs. Old women with distraught eyes, with tears streaming down their cheeks, return from the dark places below, after kissing the stones of the Sepulchre.

In profound darkness, by a broad flight of some thirty steps, worn, broken, as dangerous as a tumbled ruin, and lined by crouching figures,

we descend to the Chapel of St Helena. In passing our candles light up these shadowy motionless figures, which are of the same colour as the face of the rock. They are begging cripples, half-witted creatures covered with ulcers; all sinister, nursing their chins, their long hair streaming over their faces. Amongst these poor scarecrows is a young man, blind, enveloped in his magnificent fair curls as in a mantle, beautiful as the Christ he strangely resembles.

Right at the bottom is the Chapel of St Helena. After the darkness through which we have come, between the two rows of phantoms, it is comparatively well lighted, for the daylight enters it, pale and bluish, through the loopholes of the roof. It is surely one of the strangest of this agglomeration of buildings known as the Holy Sepulchre. It is here that one experiences in its acutest form the sense of tremendous pasts.

It is silent when we enter, and empty too, under the half-dead eyes of the phantoms who guard the staircase leading to it; and the sound of the bells and chanting above reaches us only as an indistinct murmur. Behind the altar, another staircase, lined by the same long-haired personages, descends to a deeper depth, into a deeper night.

It might be a barbaric temple. Four enormous squat pillars, Early Byzantine in style and conveying an impression of massive power, support the surbased cupola from which ostrich eggs and a thousand and one savage ornaments are suspended. The remains of paintings on the walls reveal, under the effacement of the damp and the clinging dust, the figures of holy persons of both sexes, with golden haloes, in stiff and artless attitudes. The whole is in a state of dilapidation and neglect, with oozings of water and deposits of saltpetre.

From the depth of the lower vault ascend suddenly some Abyssinian priests, who might be taken for the ancient Wise Kings issuing from the bowels of the earth: black faces under large gilt tiaras shaped like turbans, long robes of cloth of gold ornamented with imaginary red and blue flowers. Hurriedly, with that sort of excited eagerness which is customary here, they cross the crypt of Saint Helena and ascend towards the other sanctuaries by the wide ruinous staircase—illuminated on the first steps by the light which falls from the loopholes of the vault, archaically splendid then in their golden robes amid the squatting gnomes at the foot of the walls—and then suddenly disappear above in the dark distance.

At some distance from here, in the sanctuaries of the entrance, near the kiosk of the Sepulchre, rises the rock of Calvary. It supports two chapels, to which one climbs by about twenty stone steps. And this, above all the others, is the place of genuflections and sobs.

From the peristyle of these chapels, as from a high balcony, one looks down upon a confused mass of tabernacles, a labyrinth of churches where moves about the spellbound crowd. The more splendid of the two is that of the Greeks : against a silver nimbus, which shines at the back like a rainbow, stand out, life-size, the three crucified figures of Christ and the two thieves ; the walls are hidden by icons of silver, of gold and of precious stones. The altar stands on the actual spot of the Crucifixion ; beneath the reredos a silver trellis discloses in the black rock the hole in which the cross was fixed. It is here that the worshippers linger on their knees, moistening these dark stones with tears and kisses ; while a muffled sound of chanting and of prayers ascends unceasingly from the churches below.

And so it has been, in this same place, for nearly two thousand years ; under various forms, in different basilicas, interrupted by sieges, by battles and massacres, but renewed afterwards more passionately and more universally, this

same concert of prayer has always resounded here, this same grand chorus of despairing supplications and triumphant acts of grace.

This adoration may seem perhaps a little idolatrous to one who has said: "God is a Spirit, and it behoves those who adore Him, to adore Him in spirit and in truth." But it is very human. It responds to our instinct and to our unhappiness. No doubt the early Christians, in the purely spiritual impulse of their faith, when the teaching of the Master was still fresh in their minds, did not encumber themselves with magnificence, with symbols and images. And assuredly it was not earthly mementoes—a place of martyrdom and an empty sepulchre—that preoccupied them. Not there did they think to find their Redeemer, who had seen Him cast off for ever the transitory things of earth and ascend into the serene light of heaven. But we—all of us, whether of the West or of the North—are fewer centuries removed from our native barbarism than were the ancient societies from which the first Christians were gathered; in the Middle Ages, when the new faith penetrated into our forests, it was obscured by a thousand primitive credulities; amongst us there is only a small minority that has freed itself from the accumulated traditions so as to be able to embrace

the cult of the Bible in spirit and in truth. And on the other hand, when faith is dead in our modern souls, it is to this veneration of places and mementoes, so human, so natural, that unbelievers like me are brought back by the heart-breaking regret for the Saviour we have lost.

Oh! if He, if Christ, for whom all this weeping multitude has come; for whom this poor old woman, kneeling near me, kisses the pavement, pours out on the flagstones her overburdened heart; who holds me, yes, me also, in this place, as she is held, in a vague devotion, still full of tenderness—oh! if He was only one of our brethren in suffering, unconscious now in death, let His memory be worshipped none the less, for His long enduring lie of love, reunion and eternity. And let this place be blessed also, this place, unique and strange, which is called the Holy Sepulchre—yes, even though it be contestable, fictitious if you will—whither, for nearly twenty centuries, disconsolate multitudes have come, where hardened hearts have melted like snow, and where now my eyes are dim with tears, in a last outburst of prayer—very illogical, I know—but ineffable and infinite. . . .

In the evening, when darkness has fallen, and I have wandered for a long time in the

mournful little streets of the Saracen city where the crowns of fire of Ramadan have just been lit around the minarets of the mosques—an attraction draws me slowly towards the Holy Sepulchre.

A darkness different from that of the day-time now reigns there; the shafts of white light no longer fall from the loopholes of the cupola. But lamps more numerous than before are burning there, lamps of silver and lamps of gold, and thousands of coloured lamps studding the darkness with little blue and red and white flames. A sort of appeasement fills the labyrinth of lofty vaults after the exhausting ardours of the day. All that one hears now are the mutterings of prayers said quite low by people on their knees, and the murmurs in the resonant depths of the caves, where the predominant sounds are the hoarse voices of the moujiks, and, from time to time, their deep coughs. The doors will soon be closed and the crowd has ebbed away; but there are still groups of people prostrate in the shadow, their faces on the ground, embracing the holy stones.

CHAPTER VIII

Sunday, 1st April.

TO-DAY the sun makes a welcome reappearance and, in the warm spring air, the charm of Islam throws its spell upon me again.

And this is the more fitting, inasmuch as I am going this morning to the Holy Place of the Arabs, to the Mosque of Omar, one of the most marvellous and venerable of all. For Jerusalem, which is the Holy City of the Christians and Jews, is also, after Mecca, the most sacred city of the Mohammedans. The Consul-General of France and Father S——, a Dominican celebrated for his Biblical studies, are good enough to accompany me. A janissary of the Consulate precedes us. Without him even the approaches to the Mosque would be forbidden to us.

We make our way through narrow streets, dismal in spite of the sun, between old windowless walls, made of the debris of every epoch of history, with here a Hebraic stone, there a Roman marble. As we proceed the character of the place becomes more ruinous, more empty and more dead, until we reach the sacred quarter,

infinite in its desolation, which encloses the Mosque itself. All its approaches are guarded by Turkish sentries, who bar the way to Christians.

Thanks to the janissary we pass through this fanatical ring, and then, by a series of dilapidated little gateways, reach a gigantic platform, a kind of melancholy desert, with grass growing between the flagstones, in which no human being is to be seen. It is the Haram-esh-Sherif (the sacred enclosure). In the centre and at a considerable distance from us, who have entered at one of the corners of the enormous square, stands, solitarily, a surprising building, entirely blue, of a blue exquisite and rare, which looks like some old enchanted palace covered with turquoises. It is the Mosque of Omar, the marvel of Islam. With what a grand and austere solitude the Arabs have contrived to surround their blue Mosque !

On each of its sides, which are at least five hundred yards in length, this square is bounded by sombre-looking buildings, shapeless as a result of age, incomprehensible as a result of repairs and alterations carried out at different epochs of ancient history : at their base the Cyclopean stones which are the remains, upright still, of the walls of Solomon ; above, the ruins of the citadel of Herod, the ruins of the

Prætorium, where Pontius Pilate sat and from which Christ was led out to Calvary. These things were overthrown and sacked by the Saracens, and, after them, by the Crusaders; and, finally, the Saracens again, once more masters here, barred and walled up the windows, raised here and there, indiscriminately, their minarets, and superimposed on the summits of the buildings the sharp points of their battlements. The impartial hand of Time has endued the whole with a uniform reddish colour, as of old terra-cotta, with a growth of climbing plants, with the same air of dilapidation, with the self-same dust. The whole, heterogeneous, a thing of odds and ends, formidable still in its millenary antiquity, tells of the nothingness of man, of the overthrow of civilisations and of peoples, sheds an infinite sadness over the little desert of this esplanade in which, isolated beyond, stands the beautiful blue palace surmounted by its cupola and crescent, the exquisite and incomparable Mosque of Omar.

As we advance into this solitude, paved with large white flagstones and yet overgrown with grass like some cemetery, the covering of the blue Mosque becomes more distinct: it seems as if the walls were overspread with variegated jewellery in open-work, half of pale turquoise and half of vivid lapis, with a little yellow, a

little white, a little green, a little black, soberly employed in very fine arabesques.

Among some withered cypresses, some very old, dying olives, a row of secondary kiosks, scattered about the centre of the esplanade, make a sort of retinue to the marvellous Mosque in their midst : little marble mirhabs, slender archways, little triumphal arches, a colonnaded kiosk, which also is coated with blue jewellery. And all this, so broken down by the centuries, so melancholy, with such an air of abandon, on this immense square where the spring now has placed around all the flagstones garlands of daisies, buttercups and wild oats ! On a close view, one perceives that these elegant and frail little Saracen buildings have been made out of the ruins of Christian churches and ancient temples ; the columns, the marble friezes are all incongruous, taken here from a chapel of the Crusades, there from a basilica of the Greek emperors, from a Temple of Venus, or perhaps from a synagogue. If the general arrangement is Arab, calm, imprinted with the grace of the palaces of Aladdin, the detail is replete with commentary on the transience of religions and of empires ; it perpetuates the remembrance of the great wars of extermination, of the horrible sacks, of the days when blood flowed here like water, and the butchery



MOSQUE OF OMAR.

stopped only when the soldiers were tired of killing.

This blue kiosk, near the blue Mosque, would alone suffice to tell of the tremendous past of Jerusalem. Its double row of marble columns is, as it were, a museum of relics of every epoch; there are capitals there of all kinds; Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Hebrew; and some of unknown age, of savage and unknown style.

But now over all this has descended the tranquillity of death; the remains of so many hostile sanctuaries have been grouped together, in honour of the God of Islam, in an unlooked-for harmony—to remain so perhaps indefinitely, until the final return to dust. And when one remembers the struggles of the past there is strangeness in the silence that now reigns here—the silence, the forlornness, the supreme peace, in the midst of this esplanade of white stones overrun by the daisies and the grass of the fields.

We enter now the mysterious Mosque, that is surrounded by this dead and deserted space.

For the first few moments the place seems very dark; and one gets only a confused notion of fairylike splendour. A very dim light falls from the stained glass, famous throughout the East, of the series of little arched windows

above. It is as if the light passed through flowers and arabesques worked in precious stones in open setting—and that, no doubt, is the illusion the inimitable glass-workers of old wished to produce. Little by little, as we become accustomed to the gloom, we see sparkling on the walls, on the archways, on the vault, what looks like a covering of green material embroidered and embroidered again with mother-of-pearl and gold. Perhaps an old flowered brocade, or some costly leather of Cordova—or, more likely, something more beautiful and rarer even than these, which we may be able to distinguish better in a moment, when our eyes, dazzled by the glare of the sun on the stones of the esplanade, have adjusted themselves to the darkness of this thrice holy place.

The Mosque, octagonal in shape, is supported in the interior by two concentric rows of columns; the first also octagonal; the second, supporting the magnificent dome, circular.

The capitals of these columns are gilded, and the columns themselves, each of a different material, are all priceless: one of violet marble veined with white; another of red porphyry; another again of that marble, undiscoverable now for centuries, which is called the verd-antique.

The base of the walls, up to the height at which the green and gold embroideries begin, is faced with marble : large slabs cut into two equal parts and so juxtaposed as to form symmetrical designs such as are obtained in cabinet-making by the inlaying of wood.

The little windows, placed very near the vault, which throw from above their jewel-like reflections, are each different in design and colour ; one seems to be composed of daisies formed of rubies ; another, by its side, consists of delicate arabesques of sapphire, mingled with a little topaz-yellow ; a third again is of emerald-green with a sprinkling of pink flowers. What constitutes the beauty of these windows, and, in general, of all Arab windows of the kind, is that the pieces of glass of different colours are not limited brutally as with us by a line of lead ; the framework of the window is a very thick slab of stucco, perforated, pierced *obliquely* with an infinity of little holes of varying shapes—the whole making a design unfailingly exquisite. The blue, yellow, pink and green fragments are inserted at the outer extremity of these narrowing holes, so that one sees them surrounded by a kind of nimbus, which is their own reflection in the thickness of the plaster. The resulting effects are soft and melting, suggesting mother-of-pearl and precious stones.

We can distinguish better now the coverings of the arches and vaults. They are wonderful mosaics, making a complete covering and simulating brocades and embroideries, but more wonderful, more durable than any fabric of earth, having preserved their brilliance and their diapering through many centuries, because they are composed of substances almost eternal, of myriads of fragments of marble of every colour, of mother-of-pearl and gold. Green and gold are the predominating colours; and the design consists of rows of strange vases, out of which rise and fall symmetrically rigid nose-gays: all the conventional leaves of olden times, all the flowers of olden dreams, pampas above all, made of an infinite variety of green marble, and vine branches of an archaic stiffness bearing grapes of gold and grapes of mother-of-pearl. Here and there however, to break the monotony of the green, there are sowings of large reddish flowers, coloured with tiny pieces of porphyry and pink marble, on a background of gold.

In the coloured lights that filter through the windows, all this magnificence of an Eastern tale changes colour, gleams and sparkles in the gloom and silence of this place, almost always empty in the midst of empty esplanades, in which we walk alone. Some little birds, familiars of the sanctuary, fly in and out at will, through

the always opened bronze doors, alighting on the porphyry cornices, on the gold and mother-of-pearl, tolerated good-naturedly by the two or three white-bearded custodians who are kneeling and praying in dark little recesses. On the ground, over the marble flags, are spread ancient Persian and Turkish carpets, their colours exquisitely faded.

The vast centre of this circular Mosque is invisible as one enters, surrounded as it is by a double enclosure—the first of wood finely carved, after the manner of the Arab *mushrabiya*s; the second of iron of Gothic workmanship which was placed there by the Crusaders when for a brief period they turned the place into a church of Christ. By raising oneself on one of the marble pedestals, it is possible to obtain a view of this hidden interior. After the splendour of the surroundings one expects to see something of marvellous and surpassing richness, and what actually meets the eye comes almost with a sense of shock: a something dark and shapeless, in the semi-darkness of this magnificent place; a something that rises irregularly like a great black congealed wave: a natural rock, a summit of a mountain.

It is the summit of Mount Moriah, sacred to

Israelites, Mussulmans and Christians alike ; it is the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite where King David saw the destroying angel "having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem" (2 Samuel, xxiv. 16 ; 1 Chronicles, xxi. 16).

It was here that David raised the altar of burnt offering (1 Chronicles, xxii. 1), here that Solomon, his son, built the Temple, levelling at great cost the surrounding parts, but respecting the irregularities of this mountain-top, because the feet of the angel had rested on it. "Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem in Mount Moriah, where the Lord appeared to David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite" (2 Chronicles, iii. 1).

We know of what unparalleled splendours and ruthless destructions this mountain of Moriah, in the succeeding centuries, became the centre. The temple that covered it, razed to the ground by Nebuchadnezzar, rebuilt on the return from the captivity of Babylon, destroyed again under Antonius IV., was once more reconstructed by Herod—and it was then that it saw Jesus pass, heard Him speak under its roof. . . . And each of these constructions was gigantic, confounding our modern imaginations, and cost the price of an empire. The foundations which have

been discovered beneath the ground are almost superhuman. After the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, a temple of Jupiter, erected during the reign of Adrian, replaced the house of the Lord. Subsequently, the Christians of the first centuries, out of contempt for the Jews, covered the sacred summit with debris and refuse, and it was the Caliph Omar who, after he had conquered Palestine, had it piously cleansed. Finally, his successor, the Caliph Abd-el-Melek, about the year 690, sheltered it for a long sequence of centuries under the charming Mosque which still stands.

Except for the dome, which was restored in the twelfth and in the fourteenth centuries, the Crusaders, when they came, found the Mosque almost as it is to-day. Already as old in their day as our Gothic churches are in ours, it was covered then as now with unchanging embroideries of marble and gold, it had its sheen of brocade, the duration of which is indefinite, almost eternal. They converted it into a church, placing their marble altar in the centre, on the rock of David. Subsequently, Saladin, at the downfall of the Empire of the Franks, restored it to the cult of Allah, after long purifications by sprinklings of rose-water.

Above the frieze are inscriptions in gold (in those old Cufic characters which bear the same

relation to the Arabic letters as does the Gothic script to the writing of to-day), telling of Christ according to the Koran—and their profound wisdom might almost cause uneasiness in our Christian souls: “O ye who have received written revelations do not be puffed up with your religion. The Messiah Jesus is only the son of Mary, the ambassador of God, and his Word which he deposited in Mary. Believe then in God and his ambassador, and do not maintain there are three. If you refrain from this it will be better for you. God is One, God is not so constituted that He could have a son; be that far from Him. When He has resolved upon anything he says ‘Let it be’ and it is” (Sura, iv. 169; xix. 36).

A whole gigantic past, overwhelming for our modern frivolities, is evoked before this black rock, before this dome of a dead and mummied mountain, which never receives the dew of heaven, never produces a plant or a fungus, but is here as were the Pharaohs in their sarcophagi; which, after two thousand years of strife, has been sheltered now for thirteen centuries in the suffocation of this golden cupola and these marvellous walls, built for it alone. . . .

In the still tentative beginnings of Islam, this

Mosque, visited in dream by Mahomet, rivalled the holy Ka'ba, and it was towards its dark rock that the early Mussulmans turned during their prayers. Even to-day, the platform which surrounds it, all this large and deserted enclosure of the Haram-esh-Sherif, the gates of which are guarded by the Turkish sentinels, is held by the Arabs to be the most holy place on the earth after Mecca and Medina. Up to the middle of the nineteenth century it was so fanatically guarded that a Christian would have risked his life if he tried to enter it, and it is only within recent years that access to it has been permitted to people of all religions—except on certain specially holy days and on condition that one is accompanied by a guard bearing a permit from the Pasha of Jerusalem. The Jews, however, out of religious fear, never visit it; it was formerly the house of the Lord, and they fear to tread unwittingly on the Holy of Holies, the position of which is not exactly known.

At the far end of the immense enclosure, among some old cypresses, is another very ancient mosque, and one greatly venerated in Islam: El Aksa (=the most distant mosque). The dissimilar columns and capitals of this mosque, also, proceed from the destruction of

the pagan temples and Christian churches of the first centuries. In the time of the Crusades, it gave its name to the knights who occupied it: the Templars. But though no doubt it is beautiful enough in itself, we find it difficult now to admire it, after the marvellous Mosque of the Rock, which we have just left.

We are strolling now over the mournful grass and the large white flagstones, in the bright sunshine of this spring morning—a little group lost in the solitude of this thrice holy enclosure. In places the flagstones are missing and the wild oats and the flowers grow freely as in a meadow. And, around the turquoise-coloured Mosque, group and arrange themselves in different ways, in the hazard of our promenade, the singular little buildings that surround it, the blue kiosk, the mirhabs, the triumphal arches of marble, the few poor aged olives, the few large dying cypresses. An imposing desolation reigns over the whole enclosure, which is as it were the silent heart of ancient Jerusalem; which is also as it were the holy naos of all the religions that have sprung from the Bible — Christianity, Islam and Judaism. It commands the highest reverence of all those who worship the God of Abraham whether they call Him Allah, Rabbi, or Jehovah—and its forlorn melancholy attests

that the faith of olden times, in all its forms, is dying in the hearts of men. . . .

From time to time, above these ancient buildings that surround the Haram-esh-Sherif, appears, a little distance away, a mournful hillside of grey stones, dotted with the black of a few rare olives.

“That,” says, pointing to it, the white-robed Father who has been good enough to accompany us and to place his erudition at our service—
“That,” he says, “I need not name for you ; you know what it is, do you not ? ”

And lowering his voice, as in respectful awe, he pronounces the name :

“Gethsemane ! ”

Gethsemane ! No, I did not know it, for I am still but a pilgrim newly come to Jerusalem. But the sound of the name moves me to the fibres of my being and I gaze at the still distant apparition with complex and indescribable feelings, in which tenderness and suffering are mingled.

At a point where the platform looks sheer down upon unsuspected ravines there are some narrow loopholes pierced in the enclosure wall.

“Look,” says the White Father, pointing with his hand to one of these openings ; and following his gesture I look through.

And what a darksome abyss is there disclosed. An abyss of a very special and peculiar kind, which before this morning I had never seen, but which I nevertheless recognise at once : the Valley of Jehoshaphat !

Looking down through the narrow loophole I contemplate it with a shudder. Right at the bottom, in its deepest folds, is the dried-up bed of the Kidron. On the opposite slope are those things, of an aspect and a sadness unique in the world, which are known as the tombs of Absalom and Jehoshaphat. And all about, in a silence as mournful as that in which we stand, in a solitude that is a continuation of the solitude of this holy enclosure, is the valley filled with the dead. Tombs and tombs, an infinity of tombs, a scattering of similar stones as innumerable as the pebbles of the sea-shore—and with such an appearance of abandonment, of definitive oblivion, that it seems impossible that a resurrection should ever come to open them. The whole place, this morning, under its ephemeral covering of grass and flowers, bears witness mournfully to the irrevocableness of death and the triumph of dust. . . .

We now descend *beneath* the Haram-esh-Sherif—for in all that part which overhangs the Valley of Jehoshaphat, this deserted plain is

artificial, upheld in the air by an immense substructure, by a world of pillars and arches. It was King Solomon who, in his grandiose ideas of a man of olden times, conceived the augmentation in this way of the platform of the Temple in order to increase its magnificence.

A kind of catacombs, with rows of parallel arcades, and vaults fringed with stalactites, the underground parts of Haram-esh-Sherif enable one to measure the enormity of the works of the past, their mightiness compared with ours.

In the times of the Crusades these subterraneous constructions of Solomon served to lodge the cavalry of the Franks, and one may still see, fastened in the walls, the iron rings to which the Knights Templars tied their horses.

In the enclosing wall of the Haram-esh-Sherif there are still visible two of the gates of the Temple of Jerusalem.

One is the Golden Gate, opening on to the Valley of the Kidron, through which, according to an acceptable tradition, Christ entered, amid the acclamations of the Jewish people, on Palm Sunday. It is now completely closed by Saracen stone-work and has, moreover, been repaired, at many distant epochs, in very diverse styles. And while we are there, listening to

Father S——, who is endeavouring to reconstitute for us the ancient aspect of the place, our minds are plunged so deeply in the backward of time that we hear without surprise such phrases as : “ Oh ! that is of no interest : it isn’t very old, it is only an addition of the time of Herod.”

The other, the Double Gate, which is now also walled up, was formerly that Central Gate by which people coming from Ophel used to “ go up ” into the Temple. It was through this gate no doubt that Solomon passed with the Queen of Sheba. Archæologists are divided as to whether its last renovation dates from the time of Herod or from the Byzantine epoch. It is surrounded by subterraneous caverns which have preserved their secrets and rest on Cyclopean foundations ; far more than the preceding one it impresses us with a sense of heavy and tenebrous antiquity. The monolith column which divides it in the middle is probably a last vestige, upright still, of the Temple of Solomon ; it is dwarfish, monstrous, and crowned by a simple capital representing palms ; the lintel which it supports is one of those colossal stones which the ancients had the secret of moving like bundles of straw, but which would crush under their weight our modern machines. The whole of this Double Gate, incomprehensible

under its accumulations of plaster and thick chalk, remains here like the debris of some construction built, in the night of the past, by giants. Before this column and lintel, the imagination tries to conceive what must have been in its first magnificent enormity the Temple of the Lord—which has become to-day this desert of the Haram-esh-Sherif, where a blue mosque is enthroned in solitariness.

CHAPTER IX

Monday, 2nd April.

WE met this morning, outside the walls of Jerusalem, the funeral procession of a Russian pilgrim—for many of them die, alas! in the course of their journeys to Palestine—an old woman, her face of yellow wax uncovered, borne along by other matushkas. And hundreds of pilgrims, men and women, follow; all the old faded petticoats are there; all the old fur caps; all the grey beards of the moujiks, the whole sordid and dark-coloured crowd. But faith triumphant radiates from their eyes, and they sing together a canticle of joy. They deem her happy, envy her, who has died in this holy land. Oh, the faith of these people! . . .

At sunset this evening, leaving the monastery of the Fathers of St Anne, I found myself quite near the guarded enclosure of Haram-esh-Sherif, quite near the probable site of the prætorium of Pilate and the starting-point of the Via Dolorosa—in a quarter deserted and sinister.

The good Fathers of St Anne had just shown me their old Basilica of the Crusades; they had

taken me into their garden to let me see a reservoir recently brought to light as a result of their labours, which appears to be the Pool of Bethesda ; they had led me down into their deep subterraneous places, where a very probable tradition places the house of St Anne, the mother of the Virgin Mary, and to which, it is averred, in any case, long before the visit of St Helena, the hermits of Mount Carmel, the Christians of the first and second century, used to descend by an air-hole to hold their clandestine meetings for prayer.

All this past was living again in my mind as I left the venerable place, and proceeded, in the silence of the golden twilight, to ascend, between the desolate walls and ruins, the whole Via Dolorosa, in order to reach the new quarter in which I am staying near the Jaffa Gate.

On my left the enclosure of the Haram-esh-Sherif, absolutely impenetrable after the hour of the Moghreb, has just been shut ; and, stretching before me, pressed between mournful walls, a kind of little street of death leads to the Via Dolorosa.

The Via that is venerated at the present day has been recognised only since the sixteenth century, and is fictitious in its details, though

true enough no doubt in its direction and main lines. Here certainly, in this quarter of ruins surrounding the palace of Pilate, things must have changed less than farther on in the neighbourhood of Calvary. The ancient Roman pavement is to be found some few feet below the raised soil of to-day, and certain of these old walls, more deeply set in the earth than they formerly were, but nevertheless upright still in their original places, perhaps saw Christ pass carrying the cross.

This evening the Way is deserted, and already dark in its deep constriction, with a little fading golden light high up on the summits of its reddish stones. The sun must be very low, on the point of setting. A sound of organs and religious chants still issues from the chapel of the Fathers of St Anne, who have just closed their door behind me.

The street ascends, toilsome, narrow and dark, between two rows of ancient walls; in places, large arches and fragments of vaulting cross it, span it irregularly, and cast a deeper shadow. Its walls, some thirty feet high, are built of large stones, Roman and Saracen, of one same colour, a little suggestive of blood, with here and there in their dilapidation some clinging plants; at intervals, enormous buttresses, worn and crumbling, support them.

Other streets cross this one, equally empty and equally dead, without windows, without openings of any kind, vaulted almost completely by heavy arches, either semicircular or ogival, and narrowing until they vanish in the distance, in a mysterious darkness, as of a city of the dead. A few rare and furtive phantoms are all that one sees in the depths of these passages : veiled women or Bedouins draped in greyish mantles.

Hic flagellabit . . . says a marble slab set above a doorway. This, then, is the Chapel of the Scourging of Christ, and we are near the beginning of the Via Dolorosa. Here are the Turkish barracks, built on the site of the palace of Pilate, the first station of the Way of the Cross. From here to the Holy Sepulchre all the following stations will be marked for me by inscriptions or by pillars.

Growing fainter and more confused, as I draw slowly away from it, the music of the Fathers of St Anne is now nearly lost in the distance, in spite of the immense and silent stillness that spreads over Jerusalem with the twilight.

But now other songs are heard, other canticles, other organ sounds ; I am passing before another convent, under the Roman Arch of the Ecce Homo (St John, xix. 5), and it is the Sisters of Zion who are singing behind these walls, to the glory of their Saviour.

The Via Dolorosa continues its mournful and solitary ascent, with breaks here and there and sudden turnings between its mournful houses. The last golden reflections have now died away from the points of the highest stones and the singing of the Sisters of Zion begins to grow faint; but, above these walls which imprison me, a higher part of Jerusalem is outlined in shadowy grey on the warm sky; a mass of little ancient cupolas, with the minarets crowned already, in honour of the Ramadan, with their nocturnal fires.

The canticles of the Sisters of Zion can no longer be heard, but other religious cries, excited and strident, ascend together from different points of the town, traversing the air like far-flung rockets: the muezzins, singing the Moghreb! Oh, Jerusalem, holy for the Christians, holy for the Mussulmans, holy for the Jews, a sound of lamentation and of prayer goes up from thee unceasingly! . . .

The Way continues to ascend. At times, Saracen houses cross it—like sinister overhanging bridges—houses that look down upon it from mistrustful little windows barbed and barred with iron. The muezzins have finished calling; the twilight and the silence have thrown their enchantment over this Via Dolorosa, which yesterday I saw commonplace and

disillusioning in the light of broad day; the mystery of gloom transfigures it; its name alone, as I repeat it to myself, has in it a holy music; the Great Remembrance seems to sing everywhere in the stones. . . .

Slowly, I reach the seventh station of the Way of the Cross.—that Judiciary Gate by which Christ must have left Jerusalem to continue the ascent to Golgotha. Then I have to traverse a dark and noisy neighbourhood, encumbered with Arabs and camels, into which, without transition, I penetrate after the calm, after the solitude of the lower-lying city. This is the “Oil Bazaar,” a quarter of little passages covered entirely with a semicircular vaulting by the labours of the Crusaders and become to-day the centre of a continual Bedouin swarming. It is dark there; the lanterns are lit in the booths where the oil and the cereals are sold; one is jostled in the narrow passages by the burnoused passers-by, and deafened by the cries of the vendors and the bells of the camels.

Then, as we leave this covered bazaar, the calm returns again, and the religious chantings recommence. I have reached the end of the Via Dolorosa: the Holy Sepulchre! As always the door of the basilica is wide open and the sound of psalmodies issues from it.

This evening it is the Armenians, in black cagoules, who are singing near the entrance, incensing the "Stone of Unction" and prostrating themselves to kiss it; one amongst them, the chief officiant, wears a golden robe and a red tiara.

And now they have done and retire ritually into the obscure labyrinth of the churches, very rapidly as usual, as if they were in haste to worship elsewhere, in some other part of this place where is no end to worship, where the least stones are daily incensed and tearfully embraced. No sooner is their chanting lost in the distance of the vaults than another sound approaches, ascending from the dark depths below, powerful and massive like that of a moving multitude, of a multitude which advances murmuring prayers in a low voice in resonant caverns. . . . It is a horde of pilgrims from the Caucasus, whom I saw entering Jerusalem this morning; they are returning from the subterranean chapels and are about to depart, their day's devotions done. When they reach the Kiosk of the Sepulchre they make the circuit of it, kissing each stone, lifting the little children so that they too may kiss; and their eyes, through their tears, are all uplifted, in ecstatic prayer, to heaven. . . .

Is it really possible that so many supplica-

tions—childish, idolatrous though they be, tainted, if you will, by simple grossness—should be heard by no one? That a God—or even a supreme Reason in that which is—having allowed them to be born, should plunge again into nothingness creatures so worn with suffering, so athirst for eternity and reunion. No, the stupid cruelty of that never seemed to me so inadmissible as this evening. This simple argument, as old as philosophy, which I had judged as empty as philosophy, takes on in this place, before these great manifestations of distress at the Holy Sepulchre, a semblance of force, and awakens in my heart of hearts, in a manner unlooked for and strangely sweet, old long dead hopes! And in a brotherly spirit I invoke a blessing, for what little good it may do them, on these humble souls that now pass before me, whispering in the shadows their confident prayers. . . .

CHAPTER X

Tuesday, 3rd April.

FROM the high roof of the Convent of the Sisters of Zion, where I am to-day, in the luminous and already golden hour that precedes the evening, one has a bird's-eye view of the whole extent of the Holy City. The two sisters who have been good enough to conduct me to this point of vantage—excellent religious now, who in the world had been women of society—show me, with a wealth of information, the distribution of this city where they have come to live and joyously to die. The ruins, the churches and monasteries, the innumerable assemblage of little cupolas of greyish stone, the great dark walls and the dead expanses, all this is unfolded under my eyes, in an immense picture of abandonment and melancholy.

We are almost in the middle of the Mussulman quarter, and the first cupolas, the first roofs below us belong to mysterious dwellings. We overlook from quite near a little monastery of Hindoo dervishes, in which the Moham-medan pilgrims from the Far East are received and lodged ; it is a strange and melancholy

place enough, where some women and some cats are dreaming and dozing at this moment in the evening sun, seated on the old stones of the roofs. Farther away and towards the west is the faubourg of Jaffa : the Consulate, the hotels, all the modern things, which from here can scarcely be distinguished, and upon which, for that matter, we willingly turn our back. In succession towards the south-west follow the Greek quarter, the Armenian quarter and the blackish quarter of the Jews : thousands of little similar and very ancient-looking domes, with a few minarets, a few church spires ; all this enclosed, separated from the stony and deserted countryside by high ramparts with Saracen embattlements. Right in the south-east, the enclosure of Haram-esh-Sherif, which we now behold from above, stretches its holy solitudes, in which, isolated and magnificent, is enthroned the blue Mosque ; above its fortress walls, Gethsemane and the Mount of Olives uplift their grey summits, and, higher still than they, in an almost unreal distance, are sketched in greyish blue the mountains of the land of Moab. The Sacred Enclosure has an infinite sadness and charm, seen thus from above, with its few cypresses, which look almost like black tears, with its kiosks, its mirhabs, its white marble porticoes, scattered around the

marvellous tiled Mosque. And there are people to-day in this place usually so empty, some Mohammedan pilgrims—quite little pygmies they look from here—a procession of brilliant red and yellow robes, issuing from the blue-walled sanctuary and moving silently across the mournful plateau ; a scene of the past, it seems, with the sinking sun throwing an increasingly golden light on Jerusalem, and the calm line of the mountains of Moab beyond beginning to take on the violet and rose coloured tones of evening.

The Sisters of Zion possess one of the most enviable sites of Jerusalem.

In the first place the Roman Arch of the *Ecce Homo*, which crosses the *Via Dolorosa* opposite their convent, is continued inside their building by a second almost identical arch, which they have left intact, with its old defaced and reddish stones, and which is strangely impressive. It is probably a portion of the *Prætorium* of Pilate, standing in the midst of their all-white chapel—which is, moreover, decorated with a quiet tastefulness and a supreme distinction.

And secondly, in excavating beneath their cloister, they have discovered other impressive ruins : a kind of Roman guard-room, which

probably was used by the soldiers of the Prætorium; the beginning of a road, with an antique pavement, the direction of which is the same as that of the Via Dolorosa as now recognised, and, finally, the entrances of some subterraneous caverns which seem to lead to the Haram-sherif, to the enclosure of the Temple. In this way, by continuing the excavation on all sides, under the convents, under the churches, to some thirty or forty feet below the existing level, the Jerusalem of Christ will soon be reconstituted.

In the Convent of the Sisters of Zion, of course, this street and these subterranean passages end abruptly, lost in the accumulated earth, as soon as the boundary of the community's territory is reached. But farther on, they say, in different places, other religious have begun similar excavations; each monastery is busy sinking shafts deep into the ground, and one is able by piecing together theoretically the fragments of the Herodian roads and the debris of the ancient ramparts to discover and follow as far as Calvary the way followed by Christ.

What strikes one as singular in these excavations is the preservation of this ancient pavement, the polish of these reddish stones, which, buried for centuries underground, have been

spared the wear of footsteps. . . . On one of these flags, roughly cut with a knife, there is even a game of "margelle," similar to those of our own days!—a game which had been traced by the Roman soldiers to while away their hours of guard. Puerile as it is, this detail is strangely affecting. Its presence seems to throw a gleam of sudden life into this phantom of a place!

Are we in very truth in the guard-room of the Prætorium? And this beginning of a street, which starts from here in deep sepulchral darkness, to lose itself in the earth, is it indeed the beginning of the way that led Christ to Golgotha? We are not yet justified in affirming it, despite the strong probabilities. But the sister who accompanies me in these vaults, throwing over the age-old walls the light of her lantern, has succeeded in imparting to me for the moment her own ardent conviction. I, too, in the presence of these debris, as much moved as she herself, I too for a time have no doubt of it.

This game of "margelle" attracts and holds my eyes. . . . Now, I can almost see them, see the soldiers of Pilate, sitting playing there, while Jesus is being questioned in the Prætorium. Involuntarily, spontaneously, I seem to see with my mind's eye the scenes of the

Passion with their intimate realities, their details at once very human and very small; they appear to me now strangely actual, without any great concourse of multitudes, shorn of the glory with which the centuries have surrounded them, diminished—as all things are when seen at the time of their accomplishment—and reduced, no doubt, to their true proportions. There passes before me the little group of sufferers dragging their crosses over these old, red pavements. . . . It is the dawn of a typical day of the cloudy springtime of Judæa; even here they pass, between these walls that have so long been buried, on which my hand is now resting; they pass accompanied chiefly by a horde of early risen vagabonds and followed timidly at a distance by little groups of disciples and women, whom anxiety had kept wakeful throughout the preceding cold night, who had watched and wept about a fire. . . . The event which remade the world, which after nineteen hundred years still draws excited multitudes to Jerusalem, and causes them there to fall on their knees that, crawling, they may press their lips against stones, appears to me at this moment as an obscure little act of capital punishment, carried out hastily and early in the morning, in the middle of a city whose daily habits were scarcely disturbed by it.

As I pass through these underground places, at the side of this white-robed nun, the vision thus vouchsafed to me is revealed unequally, in flashes, for fleeting seconds, with empty intervals, lacunæ, dark abysmal gaps, as in dreams. . . . Now the Crucifixion is over, the crowd has dispersed, and quiet reigns ; the cross, under the midday sky, which is overcast and unnaturally dark, stretches out its wide arms, exceeding in its altitude the top of the walls of Jerusalem ; it is visible from the interior of the city, and is watched still, from the roofs, by a few silent women with eyes of anguish. Oh, how human were the tears shed on this day around Jesus ! His mother, and the sister of his mother, his friends and companions, weeping for Him, for *Him*, because they loved Him with a human love, with an anxious tenderness that was of this earth. What could be more humbly terrestrial than this passage of St John, which suddenly comes into my mind : “ When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by whom he loved, he saith to his mother, Woman, behold thy son ! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother ! ” (St John, xix. 26, 27).

And finally this last picture comes, unexpected and chilling, to end my dream. It is the evening of the great mournful day ; things

have quickly fallen back into their places, and resumed their heedless course; an incredible tranquillity has supervened, as on an ordinary execution; the Jewish population returns to its business and its festivals, makes preparations for the Passover, after this almost unnoticed act of punishment; never thinking that their children, and their children's children, would bear the burden and the shame of it from century to century.

When we ascend from the vaults, putting foot once more in the present day and among actual things, it is as if we were emerging from the thick night of Time into which we had been plunged, and in which our fanciful eyes had perceived the reflections of very ancient phantoms. . . . Never had I felt myself so humanly close to Christ—to the *Man*, our brother, who, as all must admit, lived and suffered in Him. It was the mysterious influence of those underground places that caused it, it was that Herodian pavement on which our feet trod, it was that little diagram traced by the soldiers of Pontius Pilate—all the subtle effluvia of the past which seemed to be exhaled there from the old stones. . . .

CHAPTER XI

Wednesday, 4th April.

PROCEEDING to-day to the Monastery of the Dominicans—where Father S—— has been good enough to arrange that I should meet him in order that he might show me the line of the old walls of Jerusalem and disclose to me the most recent proofs of the authenticity of the Holy Sepulchre—I pass the hill, covered with short grass and dotted with tombs, which is still known as the “Calvary of Gordon.”

Thirty years ago Gordon, wandering in these parts, was struck by a certain resemblance to a large death’s head presented by the rocks at the base of this hill; he concluded, too readily no doubt, that here must be the “Field of the Skull,” the true Golgotha, and his opinion, until the last few years, until the time of the most recent Russian excavations, received credit among all the more sceptical spirits, only too eager to find flaws in the old traditions.

This resemblance of the rocks is, for that matter, striking enough; especially to-day, when the sun is well placed and the light favourable; the skull is clearly outlined, contemplating

from the two caverns of its eyes the mournful surroundings.

We are now in the tranquil study of the Dominicans, looking at a large map fastened to the walls, on which is shown a reconstruction of almost the whole of the Jerusalem of Herod.

At first sight, it is difficult to explain how the Empress Helena, reaching the Holy City scarcely two hundred and fifty years after Jesus Christ, should have been so grossly deceived regarding the position of Golgotha. It is true that the Christians of the first centuries, in their evangelical spirituality, did not render worship to terrestrial places; but, making allowance for this, how could they come to forget so quickly the place of the martyrdom of the Saviour which was then scarcely more remote from them in time than are the facts of the seventeenth century—those of the reign of Louis Quatorze, for example—from us? Nevertheless this very grave objection remains: the true Calvary, according to the sacred historians, was near one of the gates and outside the walls of Jerusalem, while that of the Empress Helena seems to be situated almost in the heart of the city.

On the large mural map which we are examining are traced the three old enclosing walls,

conjectured from the excavations in the earth and from study of the old authors : the first, enclosing only the primitive city and the Temple ; the second extending farther to the north-west, but leaving *without*, in one of its re-entrant angles, Calvary and the Sepulchre ; the third, that subsisting at the present day, enclosing the whole ; this third wall is later, however, than the time of Christ. The latest Russian excavations, it seems, give striking support to the conjecture concerning the line and the re-entrant angle of this second enclosure. The objection, therefore, falls to the ground, fails utterly, and one may continue to accept as authentic that venerable place whence, for so many centuries, an immense and unceasing prayer has gone up to heaven.

Leaving the Monastery of the Dominicans, I make my way, following their directions, to the place of these most recent excavations. Entering Jerusalem by the Jaffa Gate I go down the Street of the Christians, and passing before the Holy Sepulchre, uncovering my head according to custom, I knock at the door of a Russian convent, which despite the lateness of the hour opens, exceptionally, to me.

Behind the chapel, some fifteen to twenty feet below the level of the ground as it is to-day,

the precious discoveries, carefully swept, are sheltered beneath the lofty vaults of the church, which are entirely white.

There is first of all a Herodian road, paved with striated stones, like those of the caverns of yesterday. It is probably the continuation and the end of that same Via Dolorosa which begins beyond, beneath the Convent of the Sisters of Zion, to end here at the very side of the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, at the very foot of Calvary. Then there is an indisputable fragment of the old ramparts of Jerusalem; there is the threshold, there are the basement stones of one of the gates of the city through which this gloomy Way passes and goes on—to turn and ascend in the direction of the Basilica and to bury itself under the ancient earthworks at the base of Golgotha.

All these massive and defaced things, reddish in colour like the earth, left as they were found, under the white vaults, without an ornament, without a tabernacle, without a lamp, remind one of those dead relics that lie in our museums—except that they remain in their places and are deeply rooted in the ground. The rampart is composed of those blocks of Cyclopean dimensions which are the sign of the buildings of antiquity. The threshold of this City Gate is a gigantic monolith, in which may still be

seen the holes for the enormous hinges, the central groove for the bars used in shutting the gate.

A strange road truly, strange and unique, ending abruptly in an immense impenetrable wall, and nevertheless pointing, in its slope and direction, with a kind of mutilated, broken gesture of indication which yet is undeniable and decisive, the way to Calvary. And this threshold, what a moving thing it is to gaze upon, with still its polish of age-long use ! The feet of Christ, heavy with the weight of the cross, once no doubt pressed upon it !

“ Why seek ye the living among the dead ? ” said the angel announcing the Resurrection (St Luke, xxiv. 5); and these words have become as it were the device of evangelical Christians, who set no store by the holy places. But I have ceased to be one of them, and as I shall never be able to join the ranks of the multitudes who scorn Christ or forget Him, I have fallen back amongst those who seek Him hopelessly among the dead. And here now I am seeking everywhere His shadow, which perhaps does not exist, but which for all that remains adorable and benign. And I submit, without understanding it, to the spell of His memory—the sole human memory that has kept the power to release the tears that heal. . . .

And I bow down in all humility, in deep devotion, before this funereal old threshold, but yesterday brought back to light, which knew perhaps the last steps of Jesus on that morning when He left the city, suffering, like the least among us, in the great mystery of His end.

CHAPTER XII

Thursday, 5th April.

THE declining sun finds me on horseback roaming at large in the country that lies towards the north of Jerusalem and in the direction of the Levant.

How pale the spring is here—pale, cloudy and cold ! It is true, of course, that we are on the high plateaux of Judæa, between two and three thousand feet above the level of the sea, and in a region of winds and clouds.

A country of greyish stones dotted with feeble-looking olives ; on the ground a short scant grass, with always the same flowers : anemones, irises, cyclamen.

A cold, fresh wind rises with the approach of evening ; long, ravelled clouds come from the west and course across the yellow sky. The ground is littered with ruins, is full of caverns and sepulchres ; and from time to time, among the stony hills and stony valleys, the wall of Jerusalem, in the distance, now appears and now is hidden, always grim and high, evoking the great ghosts of the Crusaders and of Saladin.

I stop at each of those two subterranean

necropoli, pierced in labyrinthine fashion in the heart of the rocks, which are always visited by travellers : one called the “Tombs of the Kings,” which is probably the burial-place of Queen Adiabene and her sons ; the other called the “Tombs of the Judges,” which, according to the most recent archæologists, was dug for the members of the Sanhedrin. Both of these testify to the grandiose pomp of olden times, and both of them are empty, having been profaned and ransacked, heaven knows how many times, in the days of invasion and pillage.

CHAPTER XIII

Friday, 6th April.

TO-DAY Father S—— has arranged to conduct me to the Valley of Jehoshaphat and Gethsemane.

The Russian archimandrite died yesterday, and his remains are presently to be borne from this side, beyond Gethsemane, to the Mount of Olives, for interment. The road we follow, which skirts on the north side the walls of Jerusalem, is therefore thronged with people come to see the procession pass. And all the beggars have come too, the crippled and the blind, and are ranged along the route, sitting like gnomes at the foot of the ramparts of Selim II., and on the stones which border the road.

And when we turn the eastern corner of the city, and the Valley of Jehoshaphat opens, like a great precipice, before us, it is filled this evening with unwonted animation. Usually a place of mournful silence it is now agog with noise and life. Greeks, Arabs, Bedouins, Jews, and women above all—groups of long white veils amongst the tombs—waiting for the passing of

the body of the old archimandrite, who is to be buried on the farther side of this gloomy valley, on the mountain opposite.

We descend first of all to the bottom of the ravine, and cross the dried-up bed of the Kidron ; and there, before ascending towards Gethsemane, we stop at the Tomb of the Virgin, an old church of the fourth century, which for more than a thousand years has been a bone of contention for the various religious bodies. To-day it belongs to the Armenians and Greeks in common, but the Syrians, the Mohammedans, the Abyssinians and the Copts have each a portion of it reserved for their devotions, and only the Latins are excluded.

From the outside one can see nothing of it but a mournful-looking mausoleum porch, the blackish stones of which are overgrown with the weeds of ruins. In the middle is an old fortress door studded with enormous nails, all warped and wry under its panoply of iron, and an iron threshold, worn by the feet of pious multitudes.

On entering one encounters a sudden darkness and an acrid smell of damp and caves, mingled with the perfume of incense ; and the ragged garments and the dirty, unmade beds of the custodians of this place filled with silver and gold. In front of us is a monumental

staircase which dives into the ground, under a sort of church nave, inclined, like the staircase, in steep descent into the dark depths below. This sloping vault, with its arches of a primitive and heavy Gothic, is the work of the Crusaders, who, on their arrival, cleansed and purified the Byzantine church below, which at that time had been converted into a mosque and was half buried. On the principal stones in fact one still may see the mark of the Frankish workmen of the thirteenth century.

From the wear of the steps, from the glistening blackness of the walls, one gets at the very outset an impression of extreme antiquity.

Descending the steps we reach what is more like a grotto than a church. From the roof, however, fall, like marvellous stalactites, hundreds of gold and silver lamps, hung in garlands and chaplets.

This crypt-like interior is irregular and broken up. It is full of incomprehensible little recesses in which the altars of the six or seven different religions seek to isolate themselves one from another. And in a corner near the tomb, among the so many Christian symbols, there is even a little mirhab for Mohammedans, who cultivate, as we know, a special devotion to the "Lady Mary, Mother of the Prophet Jesus." Here, more even than in the Holy Sepulchre, the



THE TOMB OF THE VIRGIN.

contrast is strange between the richness of the ancient gold-work, accumulated on every side, and the usury of the centuries, the dilapidation, the air of final decay : the half-broken vaults, the defaced stones, the coarse masonry, the fragments of underground rocks ; all this, smoked and blackish, oozing moisture through spiders' webs and dust. It is dark with the darkness of sepulchres. There are tenebrous passages that have been walled up for centuries, the beginnings of staircases that once upon a time led goodness knows where and now are lost in the earth. There are other tombs also, which pass for those of St Joseph, of St Anne, of the parents of the Virgin. Here and there old brocades, nailed on the rock, hang like worn-out rags, and old Oriental embroideries, stretched over the walls, are rotting and turning to dust. And the candles and the incense smoke here unceasingly, in the stifling mournfulness of the place, under this kind of rain of silver and golden hail, which is a profusion of sacred lamps and lustres, of all styles and of all times.

The authenticity of this strange sanctuary is very debatable. It was formally pronounced against by the third General Council held at Ephesus in the year 341, which placed the tomb of the Virgin at Ephesus itself, beside the tomb of St John, her adopted son. Archæologists

also dispute whether it was really St Helena who founded the original basilica, at the same time as that of the Holy Sepulchre. Whatever the facts may be, the place, such as it is, remains, in its simple barbarism, one of the most singular in Jerusalem.

As we are ascending from the darkness below, by the broad dark staircase of the Crusaders, a song, grave and magnificent, as of an approaching choir, reaches us from without; a song sung in a loud rude voice by men on the march: it is the funeral procession of the archimandrite; it is the spectacle for which the crowd was waiting, and it is presented to us as we emerge from the subterranean church into the suddenly reappearing daylight.

At the head walk men in robes of brocade, carrying, at the end of long staves, silver crosses and golden suns; then come the priests, chanting the funeral dirge. And finally the old archimandrite approaches and passes, his livid face uncovered, lying in flowers; he crosses the bed of the Kidron, and, borne feet foremost and higher than the head, begins to ascend the sacred mountain in which he is about to sleep. Near us—who are watching him, standing against the old iron gates—are some Mussulmans, on their knees, their backs turned disdainfully on the procession, praying to the

Lady Mary before descending to her tomb. They wear the green turban of pilgrims who have been to Mecca ; their grouping and their prayers constitute an element of purest Islam, which mingles quaintly with the old Russian orthodox rites of this procession. The whole thing is characteristic of this Babel that is Jerusalem. . . . We are now in the deepest part of the ravine, overshadowed from all sides ; behind the disappearing procession, with its chants and emblems, the sombre Valley of Jehoshaphat spreads the infinite succession of its tombs : on the east the cemeteries of Islam, dominated by Gethsemane and the Mount of Olives ; on the west the Mussulman cemeteries, rising one above another and crowned by the high grey wall of Jerusalem which seems to mount into the sky.

But we are bound for Gethsemane and I would have preferred silence. For the first time in my life, with feelings strangely stirred, I am about to visit that place the mere name of which, even at a distance, exerted a deep and moving spell ; and I did not look to see all these people, or this pompous funeral, or this miscellaneous multitude assembled to see a show.

First of all we enter the so-called “Grotto of the Agony”—become to-day a rock-vaulted

chapel—which has been regarded since the fourteenth century as the scene of the Agony of Christ, but which, according to an unimpeachable early tradition, is the shelter in which, on the night of the Passion, the Apostles slept. Although many other of the holy places of Jerusalem are only conjectural and probable, this can hardly be contested, any more than Gethsemane itself, for that matter, the name of which has not been changed at any epoch of history.

The little altars, very old, very modest and forlorn-looking, do not disfigure this grotto, the general aspect of which can have altered little in the nineteen hundred years. On a night of spring, as cold as that which promises this evening, the Apostles fell asleep here, their eyes weighed down with a sleep of fatigue and suffering (Matthew, xxvi. 40, 43; Mark, xiv. 40), while Christ went some distance away from them into the garden—"a stone's throw away"—for contemplation and prayer in anticipation of death. It was to this shelter that Jesus thrice returned to waken them, and it was here that He was eventually surrounded by the armed band which had come with lanterns and torches to apprehend Him.

This little vault of rocks, silent, above our heads, saw these things, heard these things. . . .

To gain admittance to the Garden of Gethsemane, which is situated some yards farther on, at the side of the Mount of Olives, we have to knock at the door of a convent of Franciscan monks who are its jealous guardians.

It is a spoilt child of a little garden, surrounded by a white wall on which has been painted a Way of the Cross. It contains eight olive-trees—which must be at least a thousand years old, if indeed they were not contemporary with Christ—but they are enclosed within rails lest the pilgrims should pluck their branches. Around it are little platbands which one of the brothers is busy raking and which are decked with the common flowers of spring, yellow gilliflowers and anemones. But there is now nothing in this little enclosure to remind us of the great past. The monks have done this wonderful thing: they have made of Gethsemane a mean and trivial thing. And one leaves it with a disillusion the more and a heart of stone.

Happily we may comfort ourselves with the reflection that the place of the last prayer of Christ is not determined to a hundred yards or so. Near the little enclosure of the Franciscans, on the stony side of the mournful mountain, there are other clumps of olives, the venerable trunks of which seem no less old, and to these

it will be possible to return, on cold and tranquil nights, to dream alone and to invoke the ghosts of the past.

But the impressions of the great past take hold of us again when, in the failing light, we find ourselves once more in the desolate and unaltered part of the Valley of Jehoshaphat. "Here, you see," says the White Father, "the aspects are the same as they must have been in the time of Christ." And he points out to us, in the mournful deployment of this Biblical landscape, the things that have changed, and those that must have persisted without any change at all. We have come to a stop, amid a multitude of tombal stones, on ground that is full of human bones, and are facing towards Jerusalem, which, seen from here, overhangs this valley of the dead like a phantom city. The general outline of the mountains has, of course, remained immutable. In our more immediate neighbourhood, on this eastern slope which we are descending, lies the infinite multitude of the tombs of Israel. Behind us, Siloam, a mass of ruins and sepulchral caverns, the haunt to-day of wild Bedouins, looks down also into the gloomy valley in which we are. On our left is the ancient Ophel, in its present abandonment no more than a hill covered with

olives and the remains of walls. And in front of us, high up, crowning the slope opposite ours, rise the high embattled walls of Jerusalem, straight and uniform throughout their whole length, save that in the middle, in a square projecting bastion, an ancient gate, sinisterly walled up, may still be discerned. This is the side of the Haram-esh-Sherif, of the Sacred Enclosure, and this part of the ramparts encloses only the empty platform of the blue Mosque ; but nothing appears above the interminable row of battlements—it is as if there were nothing within but emptiness and death. Nor, any more, is there anything without ; these approaches to the south-west of Jerusalem are like those of some forgotten necropolis ; no passers-by, no carriages, no caravans, no roads ; only a few solitary pathways among the tombs, a few goat-paths winding up the steep sides of the ravines.

The approaches to Gethsemane which we have just left and which were so animated a little time ago, during the passing of the archimandrite, have become deserted with the approach of night. In the Valley of Jehoshaphat there is now no one but ourselves—and, in the distance, some Bedouin shepherds gathering their flocks together with the music of their pipes.

We make our way down to the lowest folds of the valley, in the direction of Ophel, following the dried-up bed of the Kidron. Here the torrent of which the Bible speaks is no more than a tiny stream, and what was once its bed has been in part filled up by all that has fallen from above in the intervening centuries—by the rubbish of ruined walls, and the down-fallings from that Temple so many times sacked and destroyed. The sun is slowly sinking, leaving us deeper in the cold shadow, while a red light of conflagration illumines still the melancholy height of Siloam and the summit of the Mount of Olives.

We are now quite near those three successive mausoleums which are known as the tombs of Absalom, of Jehoshaphat, and of St James. I know not what it is, their form, their colour, their general aspect, that makes them seem so strangely sad ; but the effect is reinforced by the evening ; it is from them no doubt, much more than from the myriads of little tombs, all more or less alike, dotting the grass, that the immense mournfulness of this Valley of the Last Judgment emanates. All three are monoliths, cut where they stand out of the rock. There is nothing now within them ; they were despoiled long ago of their corpses and their treasure. What can be seen of the interior,

through the Doric columns of their openings, is the darkness of underground, the night of sepulchres ; it is this which gives them the same *expression* as that of those death's heads which in place of eyes have dark cavities ; and they seem to gaze eternally upon the gloomy valley before them. Not only are they sad ; they strike one with the chill of fear. . . .

We are now crossing the bed of the Kidron by a kind of little causeway or bridge of great antiquity, which has escaped destruction ; on the opposite slope we shall ascend by pathways to the great wall above and re-enter Jerusalem.

“When,” says the White Father, “Christ left the city on the eve of the Passion, and went up to Gethsemane, it is probable that He passed by this very way, since, as far as one can judge, this used to be the only place where the torrent was fordable.”

Then we stop once more the better to contemplate our silent surroundings. The red glow on Siloam has just died away ; we can see some last reflections lingering still, higher up, on the summits. The shrill call of the shepherds' pipes is lost in the distance. The wind has risen and the night has turned cold.

On an evening of this same season of spring, at the end of a day such as this, Jesus must

have passed by this very spot ! Evoked by the identity of place and season and hour, there comes suddenly into our minds a vision of this ascent of Christ to Gethsemane. The wall of the Temple—which has now become the wall of the Haram-esh-Sherif—stretched above there then as it does now, outlined perhaps against similar clouds. Its lower courses, composed of the great stones of Solomon, were those that we still see ; and its southern corner, which overhangs the abysm so superbly, rose into the sky at the same place. Only all this was then larger, grander, for these walls of the Temple, buried now some seventy feet in the prodigious accumulation of earth and debris, used to be a hundred and twenty feet high instead of fifty, and must have thrown into the valley a gigantic oppression. Siloam no doubt was not so ruinous, and Ophel still existed ; the unspeakable desolation foretold by the prophets had not yet begun to fall on Jerusalem. But there was the same light and the same configuration of shadow. The wind of the spring evenings brought the same shiver, and swept along the same pathways. The wild flowers—those frail little things which are yet so eternal and always end by reappearing obstinately in the same places, above the litter of palaces and cities—were the same : cyclamen and fennel and asphodels.

And Christ, as He passed here for the last time, would have been able to run His eyes, heedless of the things of earth, over these thousands of little red anemones, with which the grass of the tombs is here everywhere sprinkled, as with drops of blood. . . .

Rounding the southern corner of the walls we re-enter Jerusalem by the old gate of the Moghrebis. There is no one about within the walls ; we might be entering a city of the dead. Before us are those ravines of cacti and stones which separate Mount Moriah from the inhabited quarters of Mount Zion—an uncultivated area, through which we pass, following the wall of that other desert, the Haram-esh-Sherif, which was once the Temple.

It is Thursday evening, the traditional hour at which, every week, the Jews repair to weep, in a place specially conceded to them by the Turks, over the ruins of that Temple of Solomon “which shall never be rebuilt.” And we want to reach this place of wailing before nightfall. After the empty ground, we arrive now at narrow little streets littered with refuse ; and, finally, at a kind of enclosure, filled with the movement of a strange crowd which wails in a low, rhythmic chorus. The dim twilight is already falling. The farther end of this

enclosure, which is surrounded by mournful walls, is barred, almost overwhelmed, by a formidable building of Solomon's time, a fragment of the outer wall of the Temple, constructed of monstrous uniform blocks. And we see these men in long velvet robes, agitated in a kind of general swaying movement, like caged bears, their backs towards us, their faces turned to this gigantic ruin, beating their foreheads against the stones and murmuring a kind of tremulous chant.

One of them, who seems to be a sort of lay-clerk or rabbi, appears to lead, in a confused kind of way, this wailing choir. But few follow him; each, his Hebraic Bible in hand, gives out in his own way his own personal lamentations.

The robes are magnificent. Black velvets, blue velvets, violet and crimson velvets, lined with valuable furs. All the caps are of black velvet trimmed with long-haired fur which throws into shadow the blade-like noses and the sinister eyes. The faces, which half turn to look at us, are almost all of a special, almost an uncanny ugliness; so narrow, so emaciated, with eyes so cunning and tearful, under eyelids heavy and dead! A pink and white colouring, as of unwholesome wax, and long corkscrew curls over the ears, similar to those affected

by the English women of 1830, complete their disquieting likeness to bearded old women.

The majority of them are old—old men with base, crafty, ignoble expressions. But some are quite young, quite small, as fresh as coloured sweetmeats, yet they already wear the two curls like their elders and rock and weep with the oldest of them, their Bibles in their hands. This evening, it appears, they are nearly all “Safardim”—that is to say, Jews from Poland—etiolated and pale from centuries of bartering and usury under northern skies; very different from the “Ackenazim,” their brethren from Spain and Morocco, among whom one may find the bronzed skins and admirable features of prophets.

In penetrating thus into the heart of Jewry my chief impression is one of astonishment, discomfort, almost of fear. Nowhere have I seen such an exaggeration of the type of our sellers of old clothes, rabbit-skins, and odds and ends; nowhere, noses so pointed, so long and so pale. I have a fresh shock of surprise each time one of these old backs, vaulted in velvet and fur, makes a half-turn and a new pair of eyes gives me a furtive, sidelong look from between hanging curls and from under spectacles. Truly the crucifixion of Jesus has left an indelible stigma. Perhaps it is necessary to come here

to be fully convinced of it, but it is beyond dispute that there is some particular sign imprinted on these foreheads, a brand of shame with which the whole race is marked.

Against the wall of the Temple, against the last remnant of their ancient splendour, they are repeating the lamentations of Jeremiah, in voices that falter in cadence, and with a rapid oscillation of bodies :

“For our temple that is destroyed,” cries the Rabbi.

“We sit here solitary and weep,” replies the crowd.

“For our walls that are beaten down.”

“We sit here solitary and weep !”

“For our majesty that is past, for our great men that have perished.”

“We sit here solitary and weep !”

And there are two or three of these old men who are shedding real tears, who have placed their Bibles in the gaps in the stones, so that they may have their hands free to move above their heads in gestures of malediction.

If shaking heads and white beards are in the majority at the foot of the Wall of Tears, it is because, from all the corners of the world to which Israel has been dispersed, her sons return hither when they feel their end is near, so that they may be buried in the sacred Valley of

Jehoshaphat. And Jerusalem is becoming more and more encumbered with old greybeards that have come here to die.

In itself it is unique, touching and sublime, this unshakable attachment of a people to a lost fatherland, after so many unspeakable misfortunes, so many centuries of exile and dispersion. For a little while one might almost weep with them—if they were not Jews, if one's heart did not grow so strangely cold at the sight of their abject faces.

But, before this Wall of Wailing, the mystery of the prophecies seems more inexplicable and more striking. The mind is at a loss before this destiny of Israel, without precedent or analogue in the history of man, impossible to foresee and nevertheless foretold, in the very days of the splendour of Zion, with a disquieting precision of detail.

This evening would appear to be one of special mourning, for the place is full. And every moment brings new-comers, all alike, with the same furred caps, the same noses, and, on the temples, the same curls; all equally dirty and ugly, and all in robes of equal gorgeousness. They pass with heads bowed over open Bibles, and, even while they make a show of reading

their jeremiads, cast in our direction a sidelong downcast look as keen as the prick of a needle ; and then they go on to swell the mass of old velvet backs that crowd close along the ruins of the Temple. In the twilight, with these multitudinous murmurings, you might imagine they were a swarm of those evil flies which sometimes congregate, glued to the base of the walls. "Lead back the Children of Jerusalem!" "Hasten thou, hasten, liberator of Zion!"

And the old hands caress the stones, and the old foreheads beat the wall, and the old heads and the old curls rock in cadence.

As we are leaving and climbing once more towards the high city, by horrible little streets that are already dark, we meet still more of these velvet robes and long noses, hurrying down, keeping close to the walls, to weep below. A little late these, for the night is falling—but business, you know! And above the dark houses and the neighbouring roofs appears in the distance, lit by the last glow of the setting sun, the collection of ancient little cupolas with which Mount Zion is covered.

In issuing from this haunt of the Jews, where one experiences, despite himself, I know not what childish fears of robbery, of the evil eye and witchcraft, it is a pleasure to see once

more, instead of bowed heads, the upright and noble carriage of the Arabs, instead of skimped robes, ample and flowing draperies.

And presently the cannon booms in the Turkish quarter. It is the salvo announcing the new moon and the end of Ramadan. Jerusalem is about to become again, for a time, a Saracen city in the religious festival of Baïram.

CHAPTER XIV

Saturday, 7th April.

A SOUND of church bells follows us for a long time into the solitary campaign, as we make our way on horseback in the early morning towards Jericho, towards the River Jordan and the Dead Sea. Very quickly the Holy City disappears from sight, hidden behind the Mount of Olives. Here and there are fields of green barley, but regions of stones and asphodels predominate. There are no trees anywhere. Red anemones and violet irises enamel the grey-ness of a broken country of stones and desert. Through a succession of gorges, valleys and precipices we follow a slowly descending slope. For Jerusalem, it must be remembered, stands at an altitude of some two thousand five hundred feet, and this Dead Sea for which we are bound is twelve hundred feet below the ordinary sea-level.

If it were not for this carriage road over which our horses pass so comfortably we might, at times, be in Idumea or Arabia.

This road to Jericho, however, is crowded with people to-day: Bedouins on camels,

Arab shepherds leading hundreds of black goats, groups of Cook's tourists, on horseback and in mule carts ; Russian pilgrims returning on foot from the Jordan and carrying piously back in bottle-gourds the water of the sacred river ; Greek pilgrims from the Isle of Cyprus, in numerous batches on donkeys ; caravans of all kinds, quaint and incongruous groupings, which overtake us or meet us.

It is now noon. The high mountains of the land of Moab which lie beyond the Dead Sea, and have been in sight ever since we reached Hebron, like a diaphanous wall, seem to be no nearer, although for some three hours now we have been riding towards them—seem to recede before us indeed like the visions of mirage. But they are misty and obscure ; all the light vapours which this morning filled the sky have congregated and condensed about their summits, while above our heads the outspread blue has become purer and more magnificent.

At the half-way to Jericho, we make our midday halt at a caravanserai occupied already by Bedouins, Syrians and Greeks ; then we mount our horses again under a burning sun.

From time to time, in gulfs opening to a great depth below us, the torrent of the Kidron appears in the form of a silvery thread of foam ;

its course here has not been disturbed as it has under the walls of Jerusalem, and it flows rapidly towards the Dead Sea, half-hidden at the deep bottom of the abysses.

The mountain planes continue to descend as we approach that strange and unique region, situated below the level of the sea, where the waters of death slumber. The abnormality of this subversion of natural phenomena seems to be impressed upon us by the indescribable strangeness, producing almost a sensation of giddiness, of these descending perspectives.

Becoming ever more broken and grand the country now presents aspects almost of the real desert. All that is wanting is the impression of immeasurable solitude, which here is not. And there is always this road made by man and these continual meetings with horsemen and casual wayfarers.

Already the air is warmer and dryer than at Jerusalem and the light is more magnificent—as it always is when one approaches places without vegetation.

The mountains become barer, more cracked with drought, with crevasses opening on all sides like great abysses. The heat increases in proportion as we descend to the shores of the Dead Sea, which, in summer, is one of the hottest places in the world. A mournful sun

glares around us, on the rocks and stones, on the pale limestones over which run thousands of lizards ; while far in front of us, serving as a background for the whole, the chain of Moab remains ever in its place, like a Dantesque wall. And to-day storm-clouds darken and deform it, hiding the summits, and sometimes prolonging them high into the sky in other imaginary summits, and producing the awe of chaos.

In a certain deep valley, through which at the moment we are passing, shut in completely by vertical cliffs, there are some hundreds of camels at graze, clinging like large fantastic goats to the side of the mountain—the highest perched of all showing themselves in silhouette against the sky.

At length we issue from this defile and the mountains of Moab reappear, higher than ever now and more obscured by clouds. On this sombre background are outlined very clearly the nearest planes of this desolate country ; whitish summits, and, quite near us, blocks absolutely white, defined with an extreme hardness of outline by the burning sun.

About three o'clock, from the elevated regions in which we still are, we descry ahead of us the country that is below sea-level, and, as if our eyes had preserved the notion of the usual level, it seems to us, in fact, not to be a plain like

the others, but something too deep down, too buried, as if the earth had sunk, the bottom of a vast gulf into which the road was about to fall.

This low country too has desert-like aspects, with grey glistening belts like lava flows or outcroppings of salt; in its midst, a patch of extraordinary green, which is the oasis of Jericho—and, towards the south, a motionless expanse, with a mirror-like polish and a mournful slaty colour, which begins and stretches away into the distance so that its termination cannot be seen—the Dead Sea, made gloomy to-day by the distant clouds, by all the thick opacity that weighs beyond, over the sombre shore of Moab.

The little white houses of Jericho gradually appear, in the green of the oasis, as we descend from our stony, sun-bathed heights. It can scarcely be called a village. It seems no more than a vestige of the three large and celebrated cities that formerly followed one another on its site, and, in the different epochs, were called Jericho. The destructions, the utter annihilations of the cities of Canaan and Idumea are almost beyond the power of human intelligence to grasp. It seems indeed that, over them all, there must have passed some truly potent breath of malediction and death.

When we reach the low-lying plain, the over-



JUDEAN DESERT AND THE DEAD SEA.

powering heat surprises us. We might have made a prodigious journey towards the south—whereas, as a matter of fact, all that we have done is to descend a few hundred feet into the bowels of the earth. It is to their low level that the surroundings of the Dead Sea owe their exceptional climate.

The Jericho of to-day is composed of a little Turkish citadel; three or four new houses, built for the tourists and pilgrims; some fifty Arab habitations of beaten earth, roofed with thorny branches, and a few Bedouin tents. Around are gardens in which a few palm-trees grow; a wood of green shrubs intersected with clear streams; some pathways overgrown with grass, where burnoused horsemen caracole on long-maned horses; and that is all. Beyond the wood the uninhabitable desert begins at once; and very near is the Dead Sea, spreading its mysterious winding sheet over the engulfed kingdoms of Sodom and Gomorrah. It has an aspect all its own, this sea, and, this evening, a very mournful one; it really does give the impression of death, with its heavy, livid, motionless waters, between the deserts of its two shores where great confused mountains mingle with the storm-clouds in the sky.

CHAPTER XV

Sunday, 8th April.

FROM Jericho, where we have passed the night, the Dead Sea looks but a short distance; in a few minutes, one would think, it should be easy to reach its tranquil surface—which this morning is of a blue only slightly tinted with slate-colour, beneath a sky swept clear of all the clouds of yesterday. And yet to reach it on horseback takes nearly another two hours, under an oppressive sun, across a little desert, which, apart from the question of size, resembles the great desert in which, a little time back, we passed so many days. Towards the sea, which seems to recede from us as we approach it, we descend by a succession of crumbling strata, of empty plateaux glistening with sand and salt. We find there again some of the odorous plants of Arabia-Petræa, and even the semblances of mirage, the deceptiveness of distance, and the continuous trembling of the air. We find there also a band of Bedouins almost like our friends of the desert, with their long-sleeved shirts flapping like wings, with their little brown veils fastened round the forehead with black laces, the

two ends of which hang over the temples like the ears of an animal. And, in fact, these banks of the Dead Sea, especially on the southern side, are almost as much haunted by robbers as Idumea.

We know, of course, that geologists date the existence of the Dead Sea from the first ages of the world ; they do not contest, however, that at the time of the destruction of the accursed cities, it may have suddenly overflowed its banks, following some new eruption, so as to cover the site of the Moabite Pentapolis. And it was then that all this “ Valley of the Woods,” where had assembled, against Chedorlaomer, the kings of Sodom, of Gomorrah, of Admah, and Zeboiim and Zoar (Genesis, xiv. 3), was engulfed ; all that plain of Siddim “ which seemed a very pleasant country, watered with streams like a garden of Paradise ” (Genesis, xiii. 10). Since those ancient days the Sea has receded somewhat, without, however, any sensible change of form. And under the shroud of its heavy waters, inaccessible to divers on account of their density, strange ruins sleep, ruins which no doubt will never be explored ; Sodom and Gomorrah are there, buried in its dark depths.

At the present day the Dead Sea, bounded on the north by the desert which we are now

crossing, has a length of about fifty miles, between two parallel ranges of mountains : on the east those of Moab, which exude bitumen eternally and are this morning in a violet shadow ; on the west those of Judæa, of a quite different nature, consisting of whitish limestone, which are at this moment dazzling in the sunlight. On both sides the desolation is equally absolute ; the same silence broods over the same appearance of death. There are indeed the motionless and a little terrifying aspects of the desert—and one can imagine them making a very vivid impression on travellers who did not know Greater Arabia ; but for us there is nothing here but a too small copy of the mournful phantasmagorias of the great original. Moreover, one does not quite lose sight of the citadel of Jericho ; from our height on horseback we can still perceive it, behind us, a vague little white point, holding out a promise of protection. In the far distance of the sands, behind the tremulous waves of mirage, appears also an old fortress, which is a convent for Greek monks. And, finally, another white spot, just perceptible above, in a fold of the Judæan mountains, there is that mausoleum which passes for the tomb of Moses—to which within the next few days a great Mohammedan pilgrimage will begin.

Nevertheless, on the sinister shore, which we have now reached, the prevailing impression is one of death, death truly imposing and sovereign. There is first of all, like a line of defence which it is necessary to cross, a belt of partly submerged woods, of branches and trees stripped of their bark and become almost petrified as a result of their chemical bath, as white as dead bones—they might be a collection of giant vertebræ. Then there is a quantity of round pebbles, as on all sea-shores; but not a shell, not a seaweed, not so much as a little green slime, nothing organic even of the lowest order; and the like one may see nowhere else, a sea the bed of which is as sterile as an alchemist's crucible; it is a thing abnormal and bewildering. Some dead fish lie here and there, hardened like the woods, mummied by the naphtha and salts; fish of the Jordan, brought so far by the current to be stifled at once by the accursed waters.

And in front of us, this sea stretches away, between its banks of deserted mountains, to the troubled horizon as if it had no end. Its whitish, oily waters carry stains of bitumen, spread out in large iridescent rings. They burn, too, if one attempts to drink them, like a corrosive fluid. If you enter them up to the knees, you can scarcely walk, so heavy are they;

you cannot dive into them nor even swim in them in the ordinary way; you would float on the surface like a cork buoy.

The Emperor Titus once as a test had some slaves, bound together with iron chains, thrown into it, and they were not drowned.

Some little distance away towards the east, in this little desert of sand in which we have been walking for about two hours, winds a line of bright emerald-green, very surprising amid this yellowish and grey desolation, which ends by abutting on the mournful shore; it is the River Jordan, flowing between its two curtains of trees, in their fresh greenery of April, to empty itself into the Dead Sea.

It takes us another hour, through this region of sand and salt, to reach the sacred waters of the river.

The mountains of Judæa and Moab begin to darken, as yesterday, under apocalyptic clouds. In the distance all the backgrounds are black, and the sky is black, above the mournful sparkling of the earth. And on the way, one of our muleteers, a Syrian from Beyrouth—a great simple boy of about fifteen years, whom we had engaged at Jerusalem, with his mule, to carry our baggage—bursts into tears, saying that we have brought him here to lose him,

and begging us to go back. He had never before seen this neighbourhood of the Dead Sea, and he is scared by its unusual and hostile aspect; he has been seized with a kind of physical horror of the desert; and we have to reassure him and comfort him as if he were a little child.

Some streamlets, babbling over sand and stones, herald the approach of the river. Then, suddenly, the air becomes filled with mosquitoes and gnats, which hurl themselves upon us in blinding vortices. And at length we reach the ribbon of fresh and magnificent verdure which contrasts so singularly with the surrounding parts: willows, hazel-trees, tamarisks, and a veritable jungle of tall reeds. Amid this foliage, which screens it under a thick curtain, the Jordan sluggishly rolls its yellow and slimy waters towards the Dead Sea; it is this river that for thousands of years has fed the poisonous reservoir, which serves no purpose and has no outlet. To-day it is no more than an ordinary river of the desert; its banks have been despoiled of its cities and its palaces; an infinite sadness and silence have descended upon it as upon all this abandoned Palestine. At this time of the year, when the Passover is near, it still receives some pious visits; hordes

of pilgrims, coming especially from the north, hie them hither, conducted by their priests, to bathe in it, in white robes, like the Christians of the first centuries, and to take away religiously, to their distant fatherlands, a few drops of its water, or, it may be, a shell or a pebble from its bed. But after that, when the season of pilgrimage is over, it will become solitary again for long months, and will only see at long intervals the passing of flocks, and of Arab shepherds that are half-bandits.

Midday finds us back again in Jericho, where we are staying till to-morrow morning, and we have the peaceful hours of evening in which to explore the silent oasis.

A kind of large melancholy grove in which breathes an air extraordinarily heated and in which, by virtue of the low level of the ground, live tropical beasts and plants. Thickets, medleys of green trees, shrubs rather, the false balm-tree or balm-tree of Gilead, the apple-tree of Sodom and the long-thorned *Spina-Christi* of which, so tradition has it, the crown of Jesus was made.

In olden times there was here a rich and splendid country such as in our days is Provence or the Gulf of Genoa, and marvellous gardens, renowned throughout the world, were reared

here. Solomon had acclimatised the first balm-trees brought from India. The water, carried by an extensive system of canals, permitted the cultivation of large groves of palm-trees, of sugar plantations and gardens full of roses. The whole plain was "covered with houses and palaces."

To-day there is nothing ; even the traces of this splendour are effaced ; a few heaps of stones here and there, some shapeless ruins crumbling under brambles, serve for the disputations of archæologists. It is no longer known exactly where the three celebrated cities stood that, one after another, were built here ; not the earliest Jericho, which Joshua destroyed after its walls had fallen at the sound of the holy trumpets ; not the Jericho of the prophets, where Elisha and Elijah lived, which was offered as a royal present by Antony to Cleopatra, and by Cleopatra sold to Herod, who adorned it with fresh palaces, and which was finally completely destroyed by Vespasian ; nor the Jericho of the first centuries of the Christian era, built by the Emperor Adrian, which became an archbishopric in the fourth century, and was still celebrated for its groves of palms in the times of the Crusades.

All that is over and done with ; not only have the palaces and the temples and the churches

disappeared ; but the date-palms, the rare and beautiful trees have given place to wild brambles, which now cover the oasis with a mournful network of thorns.

By ill-marked pathways, among thorny brush-wood and rippling streams, we wander for a long time in the luminous hours of the evening. A little Arab shepherd leads us very far afield to see some heaps of stones that form as it were an immense tumulus in which may still be distinguished, amid the grass and the brambles, some blocks that once were carved. Which of the three Jerichos is it that lies here before us, brought to dust ? Probably that of Herod ; but nothing certain is known about it, and, for that matter, we are not much concerned about precision of detail in the face of all this dead past.

The splendid sunset finds us almost lost in the middle of this kind of mournful grove which spreads like a great winding-sheet over this ground filled with human dust. And we increase our pace, getting a little scratched by the thorns of the balm-trees of Gilead. During our lonely walk we have met only a flock of goats and two or three evil-looking Bedouins armed with sticks. But in the trees is a joyous tumult of birds of all kinds of plumage, which

are assembling for the night; and from various points we hear the call of the tortoises. This plain in which we are walking, lying as it does below the level of the sea, is surrounded on all sides by mountains. There is first, about a thousand yards away, showing its reddish summit above the woods, that Mount of the Quarantine where, according to tradition, Christ meditated for forty days, and which has remained for nineteen centuries a kind of Thebaïd, with caves ever haunted by solitary monks and long-haired hermits. On the west stretches the distant chain of the mountains of Judæa, already in shadow, while on the east and south the crests of the Ridge of Sodom absorb the last rays of the sun and shine with a sinister splendour above the darkened sheet of the Dead Sea. All this, however, seems of small account after the desolation and rosy glare of Greater Arabia, the recollection of which abides with us, a picture graven as it were in the very substance of our eyes.

In the warm twilight, as we are sitting before the porch of the little inn at Jericho, we see approaching, at a mad gallop, a black-robed monk, his long hair streaming in the wind. He is one of the solitaries of the Mount of the Quarantine, and has contrived to be the first

to come and offer us the little wooden souvenirs of Jericho and the shell rosaries of the Jordan. At nightfall others come, each in a similar black robe, each with the same sparse hair hanging about a brigand-like countenance, and each offering us similar little carvings and rosaries.

The night is warm and a little heavy ; very different from the nights at Jerusalem, which are still cold. And as gradually the stars come out a concert of frogs begins on all sides at once, beneath the black network of the balm-trees of Gilead—a noise so continuous and at the same time so unobtrusive that it seems only another form of the tranquil silence. In the distance, from the side where the Arab encampments are, we hear the barking of the shepherds' dogs ; then, very far away, the tabour and the little Bedouin flute accompanying some savage festival ; and, at moments, quite distinct from all other sounds, the mournful falsetto of a hyena or a jackal.

And now comes another and altogether unexpected sound, nothing more nor less than a refrain of the Berlin cafés. It starts up suddenly, as if in ironic discord, in the midst of these faint and immutable sounds of the old evenings of Jericho. Some German tourists, it appears, who arrived at sunset, are encamped

near by, in the tents of the agencies—a band of “Cooks,” come to see and profane this little desert in the course of their itinerary.

It is after midnight. Everything is hushed, and the silence belongs now to the nightingales, which fill the oasis with an exquisite and crystal-clear music.

CHAPTER XVI

Monday, 9th April.

WE left Jericho this morning to return to Jerusalem. Our way is to some extent enlivened by the passage of Arab horsemen mounted on horses harnessed in a thousand colours, who gallop, in the morning sunlight, along the pathways intersected by shallow streamlets, over the grass, and among the green balm-trees.

As we ascend from the low-lying plains and reach the white limestone of the mountains of Judæa, a baking heat overwhelms us, and our horses toil laboriously up the steep and winding road. By degrees we rise above the strange region that lies below all other lands and all other seas. The light is hard and dazzling on the whiteness of the rocks and ground. There is no shade save that of our shadows; all the rest is light and fatiguing to look upon. Behind us the immense distances gradually unfolded—the Dead Sea, with its slate-coloured immobility, and the bituminous mountains of the Ridge of Sodom—seem by contrast a great dark abysm, so white are the more adjacent things.

Very black our shadows look on the white, lizard-harboured stones. Black, too, are the wayfarers, whom we meet in ever-increasing numbers, as yesterday evening, in an almost continuous procession. Bedouins driving before them hundreds of little asses; Bedouins and again Bedouins, armed with long muskets, with cutlasses and daggers, the woollen cords around their foreheads and the ends of their veils arranged like the ears of an animal; archaic and fascinating groups; groups of slender, tawny men, who show us as they pass, in a smile of salutation, teeth of porcelain. And camels, following in file, and flocks of innumerable goats, led by little shepherds with eyes of gazelles.

Sometimes at the bottom of crevasses, of fissures that might be the entrance to the infernal regions, we hear the distant roaring of the Kidron, and looking down we can see it, a slender silver thread, leaping in its almost subterranean bed, amidst a dark chaos of stones.

Little by little, as we draw nearer to Jerusalem the mountains will take on a tint of green. At this moment, instead of being whitish as they appeared from below, they have become tawny, and on their rounded ridges there is, as it were, a spotting astonishingly regular of little brown

bushes ; it almost looks as if someone had covered them with gigantic leopard-skins.

For nearly two hours now we have been ascending. The nature of the rocks has changed. The air is colder, and a slight green tint is beginning to spread. As if hidden in abysmal depths the Dead Sea has disappeared below us, with the accursed regions surrounding it.

Along the road the procession of passers-by continues. Now it is a whole pilgrimage of Cypriot peasants bound for the Jordan, men, women and children, mounted on mules and asses. Behind them, blond or reddish beards and fur caps : Russians, hundreds of Russians, very old for the most part, and nevertheless making their way on foot, white-haired moujiks and old spectacled women, exhausted, tottering. Protected by their very poverty against Bedouin attacks, they go forward without fear, jogging along with sticks. They all carry, slung over the shoulder, gourds or empty bottles, which they will fill piously at the river ; grandfathers and grandmothers who are going to take back, perhaps to Archangel and to the shores of the White Sea, a little of the sacred waters with which to baptize their grandchildren. As they pass us they give us good-day, these also ; they have not the handsome

gesture of the Bedouins; nor their engaging smile; but their salutation, more awkward though it be, seems franker and more sincere.

Below the grey crests of the mountains, the hollows of the valleys have become quite green. All around flocks are at pasture, and little burnoused shepherds are sounding their pipes. At the same point as on the evening before last we see again, above us, the same large beasts, perched in clear silhouette against the sky: camels turned loose with their young to graze. And at length the flowers reappear, stippling the rocks with red and rose-coloured dots.

At the half-way we halt at the caravanserai, where there is quite a crowd to-day.

A caravanserai that is primarily a kind of citadel to shelter travellers and their mounts from the robbers of the highway. Men from all parts, from East and West, are assembled there. It consists of an open court, a square of thick walls ornamented with iron rings, to which the animals may be tied. On one of the interior sides is a large hangar to shelter the men, and near the entrance gate is the lodge of the custodians of the place, with primitive little cooking stoves for making coffee for the travellers.

Saddled beasts of every sort and every class encumber this caravanserai of the Jericho road. Each minute sees them entering or leaving, with shyings and kickings: tourists' horses saddled in the English fashion; shaggy horses with large Arab saddles, their flanks and chests covered with fringes of multitudinous colours; long, majestic dromedaries; mules in variegated harnesses of shells and beads; unpretentious little donkeys belonging to the humbler pilgrims; poor emaciated little donkeys carrying on their back old packcloths and old wallets. And all this inextricably intermixed, congested, frantic and vociferous.

Beneath the hangar which looks out on to this courtyard a number of people are busy at luncheon—with provisions they themselves have brought, be it understood, for the caravanserai provides only water, coffee, nargilehs, and the protection of its walls. Some eat at tables, others, who have not been able to find such accommodation, make shift on the floor. There are groups, almost fashionable, of English or American tourists; more humble groups of Greek pilgrims; great numbers of Russian pilgrims, gallant old fellows with medals on their breasts, warming on the ground, over crackling branches, their little messes of soup and black bread; handsome Syrian guides, in

rich silken embroideries, great dandies these, with rakish curls escaping from their turbans, and very attentive to the lady tourists of the agencies. All these, and Turks and Serbians. And priests, who continue to hold the bridles of their donkeys even while they make their meal. And white monks and brown monks. And Bedouins, who are eating with their fingers as in the desert, gnawing with their fine white teeth the unclean remnants of chickens.

At the table next to ours, some young Maronite women are sitting. Some of them are still in costumes more or less national: a long mantle of velvet and ermine, with their hair contained in a spangled kerchief; others, alas! wear flower-trimmed hats, and are dressed after the fashion of French workgirls of five or six years ago. They are charming, nevertheless, by virtue of their freshness and their large eyes. And a friendly exchange of dates and oranges takes place between their table and ours, while we are passing slices of white bread to the brave old moujiks squatting at our feet.

Truly, to meet so strange and so cordial a Babel, one must journey over the roads of Palestine in the times of pilgrimage.

And, a few days hence, after the Feast of the

Passover, this caravanserai will become again, for long months, silent and empty, under a sun which then will be devouring.

We have another three hours' journey yet, after this midday halt, before we shall reach Jerusalem.

And throughout this time we continue to meet with parties of pilgrims. There are even Mussulman pilgrims now, repairing to the Dead Sea for the annual devotions at the tomb of Moses: groups of Turks and Arabs, the men on foot, the women, entirely veiled in white, seated on little donkeys. Nonchalant dromedaries pass, too, carrying on their backs immense light things which make them look as if they had the outspread wings of butterflies: kinds of panniers, covered with red cloth stretched over wicker cradles, in which invisible women travel at their ease.

On the way we pass the village of Bethany, whither Jesus loved to come. It is on the slope of a mountain surrounded by a few olives, a few fig-trees, and by fields magnificently green. A very poor sort of village, quite Arab to-day, with little houses in ruins, and shapeless heaps of stones. The cold wind of the heights is

blowing there at this moment, setting in motion the branches of the trees, the long grass, and the velvety new barley. And thousands of poppies and anemones make a sprinkling of vivid red spots along the little roads and on the old walls.

We dismount amongst a group of children, charming in their tatters, who have run up to hold our horses. It is before an old ogival portico coated with whitewash, on which, by way of celebrating a happy return from Mecca, someone has painted, according to custom, quaint arabesques of blue and yellow and pink.

Here and there amongst the rubbish and half-hidden in the grass, lie fragments of columns, the debris of the first centuries, or of the great Monastery of the Crusades. We are shown, near a humble mosque, a false tomb of Lazarus and, in addition, the very dubious ruins of the house of Mary and Martha. But all this leaves us quite unmoved. The earthly memorials of Christ are no longer really to be found here; it is too late, too many human hands had ransacked the Bethany of the Bible, before it came to know its tranquil inhabitants of to-day.

Directly after leaving Bethany we come in

sight of the Valley of Jehoshaphat, and Jerusalem itself reappears, unspoilt on this side, superb and desolate, outlining very high against the sky its Saracen wall, which is overtopped by its grey cupolas.

CHAPTER XVII

Tuesday, 10th April.

WE visit during the morning the Treasury of the Latins.

Attached to the great Franciscan church are some sacristies which are a veritable mass of riches. Since the Middle Ages, kings, emperors, peoples have not ceased to send magnificent presents to this Jerusalem, the immense prestige of which is to-day so near to dying.

We are shown magnificent altar coverings that are plates of silver and gold ; silver candlesticks ten feet high ; diamond crucifixes and pyxes of enamelled gold ; a monstrance for the Blessed Sacrament, in gold and precious stones, presented by a king of Naples, which must be worth nearly two hundred thousand pounds.

In rows of cupboards are priestly vestments beyond price, wrapped in muslin and ticketed : " Gift of the Republic of Venice " ; " Gift of Austria," or " Gift of Italy." Rigid and sumptuous things, which look as if they had been embroidered by patient fairies, in all the magnificence and purity of the different

ancient styles. The last of the presents from France is a set of ornaments, embroidered with golden bees in high relief on cloth of gold, which were used only once, on the day of the marriage of Napoleon III., at Notre Dame in Paris. There is a venerable chasuble, heavy with rock-crystal and precious stones, which seems to date from the Crusades. Another, which dates from the Spanish Renaissance—and is far from being the most beautiful of this prodigious collection—has only recently come back to the Treasury. It had been sent to be repaired to a convent of nuns, and the repairing, which cost six hundred pounds, took five years to complete.

Once a year, in turn, each of these freak costumes is worn by the priests, in the pompous Asiatic celebrations of the Holy Sepulchre.

And many priceless things have disappeared, we are told by the kindly guardians of these marvels: some buried in the earth during the sieges, in hiding-places that have never been discovered; others stolen in the times of pillage; others again—Bibles, stoles—burnt during the nightmare of the plagues, because they had been touched by infected priests.

And as we listen to them, before these masses of silks and golden fineries which they complacently display for us, our thoughts hark back to the superb struggles of olden times.

Indeed, this whole city, all that one sees, all that one touches, even, in some mysterious way, the very ground on which one walks, seems to be imbued with the soul of a colossal past, at once magnificent and awful.

These prelates of Jerusalem, with their gracious airs, to whom, without any thought of smiling, one says : "Your Highness," "Your Blessedness," "Most Reverend Father"—by virtue of the fact that they are here, in these old churches and these old dusty dwellings, observing superannuated rites—seem to have become men of the Middle Ages. One cannot blame them individually for following in old-established ways ; but in what a strange fashion have the Catholics and members of the Orthodox religion interpreted the lesson of simplicity that Jesus came to give the world ! To be sure, they are interesting, these prelates ; their ceremonies, their ornaments and treasures make live again the days of blind and all-compelling faith. But then we all knew that this past of pompous religions existed, and as a matter of fact it proves nothing ; its reconstitution can only serve as a vain exercise of the imagination. Behind this conventional Christ, who is shown here to everybody, behind this Christ aureoled with gold and precious

stones and strangely belittled by having passed during the centuries through so many human brains, the true figure of Christ is now more hidden from my eyes than ever. It seems to recede more and more from me and its existence even becomes more doubtful. In the first impressive hours of our arrival at Bethlehem and at the Holy Sepulchre, under the mere influence of their magical names, there came to pass in me almost a reawakening of the faith of our ancestors. Afterwards, in the melancholy countryside, and in the exhumed ruins of the Herodian roads, a reflection of Him again appeared to me; but tinged with something already more terrestrial, scarcely divine and scarcely comforting. And now it is all over. To-day, returning to Jerusalem after these three days of absence, I saw again coldly the place of the Great Remembrance—and my visit to the Treasury of the Franciscans, I am not able to explain why, has completed the freezing of my heart.

Each day of our short absence has brought its fresh pilgrimages. It is the season of the year at which Jerusalem is most animated. Crowds are arriving from all parts, churches are being decorated on every side, for the Feast of the Passover which will soon be here. The

narrow streets are encumbered with people from all the countries of the world. Processions of pilgrims pass singing canticles, processions of little Greek children chanting in high nasal voices. Some of the processions are met by long lines of mules with harnesses embroidered with shells, their innumerable little bells making a music like the chiming of church bells. And led by wild Bedouins, files of camels cleave a way through the crowd, large, slow and inoffensive beasts, which every now and then catch their over-large burdens in the shop-fronts of the vendors of crosses and rosaries. The perfume of burning incense pervades the air. And the strange, grave sound of the Turkish trumpets breaks in on the vague clamour of adoration which issues from the chapels, from the convents and the streets, always greater as the Greek Easter draws near, and which, at the Holy Sepulchre, will become a half-barbarous festival from which I am fain to escape. . . . I prefer to seek the memory of Christ in the little towns of Galilee, or on the deserted shores of that Lake of Tiberias where He passed the greater part of His life. Jerusalem smacks too much of idolatry for those whose infancy has been nourished on the simple Scriptures; the eyes may be interested in its pompous formalism, as they may, for that

matter, in the colour of the things of Islam, but it is at the expense of deeper thoughts. Christ, the Christ of the gospel, it was He alone I came to seek, like the humblest of the pilgrims, drawn by I know not what simple and confused and expiring hope of finding something of Him here, of feeling Him revive a little in the depths of my soul, were it only as a brother inexplicably consoling. . . . And my distress to-day is more woeful and more hopeless in that even here His spirit ends by vanishing from me.

Gethsemane! For many years I had dreamed of passing there a night of solitude, of supreme devotion, almost of prayer. And now I do not dare, and I put it off from night to night, fearful lest I should find there, as elsewhere, only emptiness and death.

CHAPTER XVIII

Wednesday, 11th April.

DURING the day I have visited different places where the Jerusalem of antiquity endures still—the ruins of Ophel, the City of David—and found there always the thrill of human pasts, but nothing now of Christ. Indeed, I have almost ceased to seek His fugitive memory and remain here now as in an ordinary town.

With heart weary and mind distracted, I am traversing in the falling twilight, on my way home, those little streets of the old covered bazaar, where the things of the Orient give place to the crucifixes and rosaries; and I remember the Holy Sepulchre—that is to say, the soul of Jerusalem—which is quite near, and the impulse seizes me to enter it once more and see the humble pray and weep.

There is a crowd this evening before the doors, in the restricted space surrounded by high, dismantled and crumbling buildings, with their aspects of mournful ruins, which are the exterior of this mass of chapels. And the pilgrims thread their way through the market of rosaries which is held here on the ground, covering the

old pavement with an eternal display of glass-ware.

It is the hour at which the Russians and the Greeks leave the basilicas at the approach of night after having prayed and embraced the sacred stones throughout the day.

The calm of evening begins to take possession of the dark labyrinth of the Holy Sepulchre; the sellers of the little candles have gone; it is now necessary to walk carefully, groping one's way like the blind, so as not to trip over the worn stones, so as not to fall as one descends the uneven steps.

In places a little light; coming from the cupolas above, suffices to reveal the dilapidation of the walls, which, up to the height of a man, are defaced, broken and greasy with the imposition of hands and lips.

And the beggars are still there, grotesque and Dantesque beggars, half naked in their rags, crouching against the columns in beast-like attitudes. One of them gets up, an old man without eyes, and plucks at my sleeve; he follows me with his tale of woe, pawing me, in order to guide himself, with his hideous hands. . . . From behind a pillar comes the sound of a terribly hollow cough; a poor old Cossack woman—a pilgrim—has collapsed in a corner, ill, done for, still holding her stick and her

rosary, and drinking some kind of soup out of a porringer.

And above them, shining vaguely like a hail of gold and silver falling from the roof, is the profusion of sacred lamps. And everywhere in the growing darkness the marbles gleam, and the icons with their precious stones, and the useless and sumptuous things which make of this place a palace of dreams, open to the most miserable on earth.

In groups, walking noiselessly with an exaggerated respect, the pilgrims, men and women, ascend from the distant and darksome parts of the sanctuaries. Turning back many times with salutations and signings of the cross, they slowly, and as it seems regretfully, prepare to depart—but, before they finally decide to cross the threshold, they retrace their steps, as if they had not yet made salutations enough, as if they had not yet sufficiently thanked Heaven and their Saviour, and they prostrate themselves at hazard to kiss one thing more in this holy place, a flagstone, the marble of an altar or the base of a pillar.

Under the cloud of incense which hangs motionless at half the height of the superb columns lurks a sinister human odour—an odour of poverty, of decay, of death, which for ever fills these vaults, becoming, at the time of the

great pilgrimage, as heavy as that of a battlefield on the morrow of a rout. It serves to remind us of our nothingness, this odour defiling so much magnificence, to tell us of the vileness of which our flesh is compact; it evokes the most gloomy thoughts of death. . . .

This evening, too, no kindly light reaches me in the darkness of my infinite distress; I can see here now nothing but the age-old accumulation of Byzantine traditions, and of Roman traditions superadded. Nothing awakens in me but a feeling of immense pity for these simple trustful souls, for these old men and old women almost without a to-morrow, who, throughout the day, have come to pray and weep and hope—and who carry with them already the fetidness of the grave. . . .

The Mussulman feast of Baïram ended the day before yesterday and the slender crescent of the new moon begins to make the nights almost light.

As soon as darkness falls on Jerusalem the pilgrims and tourists retire to the convents or hotels, as the case may be, and the town becomes more itself again, in the light of its ancient little lanterns.

Outside the walls there is a kind of roundway, which each evening, in the darkness, I follow

as far as the Valley of Jehoshaphat, where it descends and vanishes. It encircles Mount Zion, skirting, in an absolute and mournful solitude, the high embattled ramparts of the city from the Jaffa Gate to the Gate of the Moghrebis. There, at a point where the walls turn sharply to ascend again towards the north, it seems to disappear, to fall, to plunge into a black void—and before us is the gulf of shadow where so many thousands of the dead are waiting—waiting for the shrill call of the **LAST TRUMPET** to sound the hour of joy and terror.

There I stop and retrace my steps, postponing further progress in this direction for a few evenings longer, till the crescent shall have waxed in strength and I can see well enough to make my way down into the gloomy valley.

All this part of Jerusalem is mournful enough in broad daylight. At night, walking there alone, it becomes almost a place of religious awe; one seems to feel there all the horror of that great legendary name: the Valley of Jehoshaphat!

And the dead wait there in their legions, beneath their innumerable stones, and centuries pass, and tens of centuries pass—and still the trumpet of the Judgment Day does not sound, and in the air there is no beating

of wings to herald the coming of the terrible Archangel of the Resurrection. And meanwhile the bodies perish, and the bones crumble into dust; and in its turn crumbles the granite of the tombs. Little by little everything is mingled in one same nothingness, with a slow inexorable tranquillity. And more and more the valley is forgotten, and an ever greater silence reigns there.

CHAPTER XIX

Thursday, 12th April.

THE reveille of the Turkish trumpets sounding in the neighbourhood awakens me from a restless morning sleep. I was in the middle of a dream, which as I awaken vanishes. It began by a feeling of utter but vague distress ; something that perhaps was no more than the very clear perception of the irremediable flight of my days, of pending separations heart-breaking to contemplate, of the end of everything. And then, little by little, my human anguish seemed to melt into a prayer ; Christ was found again, the Christ of the Gospel, and I bowed down before Him, with all my suffering heart, like the pilgrims who, on the stones of the Holy Sepulchre, prostrate their exhausted bodies—and the end of earthly things no longer affected me ; and there was now no nothingness, no dust, no death—I had reached the unique and ineffable harbour, the refuge of refuges, in the absolute certainty of eternal reunion, in life and light everlasting. . . .

And then the Turkish trumpets sounded their strange morning call. My prayer vanished into

the unreal, into the impossible, leaving me with that lucidity which is peculiar to the beginning of the life of each day made somehow clearer and more inexorable.

And I remember that they are waiting for me early this morning at the Holy Sepulchre, to show me, thanks to the kind favour of the Patriarch, the Treasury of the Greeks, which it is a special privilege to be allowed to see.

The morning is warm and sunny when we arrive. Jerusalem displays the melancholy of its ruins in the gay mocking springtime. To the little high-walled square before the Holy Sepulchre, into the market of the inevitable rosaries, the first sheaves of beautiful green palms have already been brought, for the celebration of Palm Sunday, which is now drawing near.

By narrow little staircases leading out of the gloomy church the custodian of the marvellous treasures leads us to a point above Calvary itself, to the top of the high chapel, all in silver and gold, which the Greeks have established there. And there he stops us in a kind of old low-roofed and semi-dark passage, for the rules absolutely forbid entrance into the Treasury itself. A table covered with a white cloth is set before us, and on to this table one by one are

brought the pieces of ancient jewellery—while, below us, on the floors beneath, the candles burn, the incense ascends and the eternal prayers are sung. The priest, long-haired like a woman, who has been appointed to journey to and fro between us and the Treasury brings at each turn a fresh burden of gold and precious stones; priceless gifts made, on the impulse of mystic thankfulness or in remorse for crimes, by kings and queens of olden times; large Bibles, the covers of which consist of thick slabs of gold heavily encrusted with diamonds and rubies; leaden and iron caskets in the form of the headpiece of a diving-dress, which contain golden tiaras surcharged with enamel and precious stones. Icons, too, and plates, and beakers and pyxes. And a quantity of crucifixes—for use by the bishop in blessing, with slow gesture, the assembled multitude on days of solemn and pompous festival; each of these contains in the midst of a mass of enchased stones, a small fragment of the wood to which Jesus was nailed; the most singular of them all, which looks as if it were of green crystal, is composed of enormous emeralds joined together in a very fine setting which leaves them transparent. There is one Gothic reliquary—much mutilated and of an origin so disturbingly remote that it can never be discovered—carved

in the shape of a heart out of a single block of rock crystal, with a setting of emeralds ; taking it up, it is as if one held a very heavy lump of ice.

Formerly, with my Calvinistic ideas, I included in one general reprobation the magnificence of altars with that of the priests. To-day although the pomp of the sacerdotal vestments still seems to me anti-Christian, I have come to acquiesce in this employment of precious stones—of these little things which are the most precious our world contains and the most dangerously coveted. I understand better the meetness of sacrificing them like negligible trifles, and of making them into caskets of fantastic value for Bibles, for the fragments, true or supposititious, of the cross of Christ.

In the afternoon of this same day a khamsin springs up, and the sky, obscured by sand and dust, becomes sinisterly yellow. (It serves to remind us of the desert which is still near us.) Through a kind of dry mist which blurs everything we see the golden greyness of the city, with its innumerable little cupolas, and the whiter greyness of the Biblical mountains of the neighbourhood. A sort of haze broods over the earth, and the sun, which has now lost its radiancy, shows itself in the heaven like the plain round disk of a dead orb.

Returning in the evening from the Mount of Olives, in this same yellow half-light of eclipse, I follow, along the ever-lonely road, the ramparts of Jerusalem, the great mournful and solemn ramparts. On their roughened and defaced sides one may see, under the form of a little geometrical rosette of exquisite design, in still delicate relief on the old worn stones, the seal, the signature of the Arabs. It is a sign to passers-by that the men who raised these formidable defences are the same as those that fashioned the marvellous open-work of the walls of the mosques and palaces.

In the course of my lonely walk I meet only a group of old, white-bearded Arabs, in long robes and green turbans, muttering to themselves ancient and sombre things as they tell their amber beads. It is a picture of antique Mussulman times, under the familiar veil of sand and dust.

And suddenly from the city comes the chime of the Christian bells. A surprising sound it seems here to-day, strangely out of place in this scene of pure Islam.

CHAPTER XX

Friday, 13th April.

IN three days' time I am due to leave Jerusalem and to proceed to Galilee, attracted especially by the deserted shores of the Lake of Gennesaret.

To-day is occupied in visits of thanks and farewell to the Patriarch of the Greeks, to the Dominican Fathers, to the Sisters of Zion, to a host of kindly and charming mystics, absorbed by the Holy City, who spend their days here in contemplation, or in exhuming from the guardian soil the Jerusalem of Christ; and in building churches and covering with white sanctuaries, which grow ever more numerous, this place of adoration.

Three more days and I depart, and my anxious pilgrimage, looked forward to for so long, put off from year to year in an instinctive fear, will have come to an end, will have fallen like a drop of useless water into the immense gulf of things past and forgotten. And I shall have found here nothing of what, for the sake of my fellows as well as for myself, I half-hoped to find; nothing of what, with the unreasoning

confidence of a child, I half-expected to find. Nothing! Some vain traditions, which the least scrutiny suffices to show must be false; in the various religions an old, old, hereditary pomp, by which the eyes alone are intrigued, as by the colouring of Eastern things; some superstitions, idolatries—touching, if you will, touching to the point of tears—but puerile and inadmissible. Oh! who will sound the depths of my infinite distress, in the hours of recollection that come with the evening, in the hours of implacable clearsightedness of the morning. Something of the ancestral hope must have subsisted in me still, that I should experience here, before this emptiness of my last prayers, under a new and more decisive form, the consciousness of death. . . . So there is nothing then in the world which can fill the place of Christ, when once we have lived by Him—for never, even in the darkest days of my ended youth, even in moments of supreme weariness, even in the consternation of bereavement and burial, never have I known as I know to-day this feeling of despair in the face of the eternal void, the absolute, unspoken void.

At the close of day I descend towards the Kidron, to follow once more—though with cold

and unresponsive heart—the way of Christ, from the city to Gethsemane.

It is the hour at which the Valley of the Last Judgment begins to be filled with melancholy, with vague terrors. Silent and deep it comes into view at a turning of the road. I am approaching it from the Islamic side, which is already in an almost twilight gloom, while opposite, the myriads of Jewish tombs, the ruins of Siloam and Ophel, with their caves and sepulchres, are still aglow with a red phantasmagoria. So it is each evening, and so it has ever been. In the mornings the process is reversed. Then the ruddy light of the dawn first invades the Mussulman side, while the side of Israel remains for some time longer dark. Between the two zones of cemeteries facing one another here the same play goes on unceasingly, the same alternations of light are repeated indefinitely.

This evening, as usual, the Valley of Jehoshaphat is deserted. Save for a stray Bedouin shepherd guarding his goats here and there on the slopes of the hills not a soul is to be seen. Deserted and mournfully tranquil. And silent too, with a silence broken only by the calls of birds—and also, at different points in the distance, by the little dry and sonorous hammering of the sculptors of tombs, eternally busy here in the vain task of engraving names on stones.

The cemeteries of this valley know no holiday, and the earth works day and night to absorb and assimilate the dead. I now begin to descend into the valley, to plunge into the mournfulness below, by little pathways overgrown with grass and dotted with red anemones. The great shadow of the ramparts of Jerusalem descends with me, seems to follow me, lengthening very rapidly, in proportion as the sun declines. Among the tombs there is, from day to day, an ever-growing luxuriance of flowers—a luxuriance, to be sure, that will be very short-lived, in this country which is immediately dried up, immediately burnt up with the passing of the spring.

Before me now are the three strangely mournful mausoleums, the tombs of St James, of Absalom and of Jehoshaphat, the three great monoliths of reddish granite, which preside at this assembly of tombstones. And two or three paces away is the ancient causeway by which one crosses the bed of the Kidron to go up to Gethsemane. But what is the use of proceeding farther? What is the use of ascending these slopes again in the vague pursuit of the phantom that has escaped me? Gethsemane is a place of no special interest, cold and empty. There is no stir above its stones, nothing moves there but the breath of spring-

time, kindly to the asphodels and anemones. And so I stop again, and this time turn and retrace my steps—and suddenly within me there awakens a new feeling, a feeling almost of rancour against this Christ, whom I have sought so vainly : a silly piece of childish barbarianism, inherited from the artless olden times, that likens me to the poor simpletons who promise earthly gifts to their gods, or it may be vow them their little hates. And, discovering this sentiment, in the dark places of this mournful composite me which the generations and centuries have produced, I smile at myself with an ironical pity.

Retracing my steps I ascend again to the Mussulman part of the valley, by the escarpments of the western hills, on the top of which stretches the long wall of Jerusalem, its battlements denticulated now against a yellow sky. And I walk there at hazard among the little mysteriously carved pyramids, among the little funerary kiosks with their delicate ogives, which are aging and crumbling. It is the delightful part of the Valley of Jehoshaphat, this zone of the Arab cemeteries, which covers the steep slopes from the foot of the great ramparts of Haram-esh-Sherif to the depths where the Kidron hides.



THE CYPRESSES OF THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE.

The light is dying. The Bedouin shepherds are returning towards Siloam, piping their melancholy calls. . . . And, as my rambling stroll comes to an end, I remember that to-day is Friday ; and an idle curiosity leads me, through the solitudes of the lower town, to the Wall of Tears, the Wailing Place, where I was last Friday.

In the little streets leading to it, which are littered with dead dogs, dead cats, with refuse of every kind, I come upon a crowd which is also proceeding thither, drawn by a mocking interest, a whole Neapolitan pilgrimage escorted by monks, men and women wearing red crosses on their breasts, like those noisy hordes that, in the south of France, flock to Lourdes.

I reach the foot of the Temple at the same time as this profane crowd. Old velvet robes, old grey curls, old hands upraised in malediction, they are there faithfully, the elders of Israel, who soon will be nourishing the weeds of the Valley of Jehoshaphat. They are less numerous, however, than they were last week ; and they chant the lamentations of their prophet in less tranquillity. Before we arrived, entering like an invasion, a group of Arab children was already there tormenting them ; little imps disguised as animals, as dogs, in brown sackcloth, walking on all-fours, and

barking at their heels, with bursts of mocking laughter. And yet somehow this evening the old stooped backs, the long pale noses and the evil eyes fill one with a profound pity. . . .

Later on, in the quarter in which I have my lodging, in the Street of the Christians and in the odious Jaffa quarter, with its reek of factory smoke, on the road from the station and in the corridors of the hotel, I find, at nightfall, a concourse of new-comers from all the corners of Europe, poured out by the little railway from the coast. For the most part they are displeasing and vulgar, tourists without respect, or middle-class pilgrims, whose routine devotion serves to chill me more than ever. . . . All this part of Jerusalem has become as commonplace as a Parisian suburb.

CHAPTER XXI

Saturday, 14th April.

AWAKENED by the familiar sound of the Turkish bugles, I regain consciousness amid the ordinary racket of a hotel. Doors are banging, loud-voiced discussions in English and German are in progress, trunks are being dragged heavily along the crowded corridors. And this is the Holy City! And the day after to-morrow I shall leave it, never to return, without having seen the light I had hoped to see, without having experienced even a moment of real devotion.

During these last days in which, in the heart-broken clear-sightedness of the mornings, I feel that I have lost everything, dear dead faces appear to me, as if to bid me a last good-bye. And yet I was living without hope, or so at least it seemed—like so many others who in this respect share my misfortune. We imagine that we no longer believe, but in our heart of hearts there subsists still something of the tender trustfulness of our forbears. And now that Christ has ceased to exist, has passed definitely out of my life, the venerated and

cherished faces that were sleeping in Him seem to me to have departed also, to have receded into a more obscure remoteness. Them too I have lost, buried beneath a more definitive dust. After death, as during life, all is ended for me, ended inexorably.

I am going to spend to-day with representatives of that interesting Armenia, the history of which since remote antiquity has been one long tale of suffering and unhappiness.

If it is difficult to obtain permission to view the Treasury of the Greeks, it is almost impossible to do so in the case of the Treasury of the Armenians. Indeed before this day it had been shown to no one; and we had to invoke the good offices of our Consul-General with the kindly Patriarch before the necessary permission was granted.

The ground allocated to the Armenians occupies nearly half Mount Zion, and is fortified like the citadels of the Middle Ages. The other, eastern, part of the mount belongs to the Jews.

Before beginning our excursion in this very private neighbourhood we pay a visit of acknowledgment to the Patriarch. We are shown into a reception hall large enough for that of a palace, and there we are bidden wait. Presently, through a door the curtains of which

are raised almost ritually by two black-hooded priests, the Patriarch enters, and seats himself near us on his throne. His head is admirable under the austere black hood ; his features have an ascetic pallor, his prophet-like beard is white, his eyes and eyebrows are of an Oriental black. In his reception of us, in his smile, in his whole person, there is a distinguished and charming grace, tinged with a certain Asiatic strangeness. Amid this ceremonial and these ancient surroundings he seems a prelate of olden times. He receives us, too, in Turkish fashion—with coffee, cigarettes and the traditional conserve of roses.

Besides the church and the convents, the Armenian quarter contains an immense and ancient hostelry capable of holding nearly three thousand pilgrims. Within the walls of this hostelry, which are from ten to twelve feet thick, are silos for provisions, and a cistern in which water sufficient to last for four years could be stored. Such were the precautions taken of old against sieges, surprises and massacres.

The church, to which we come last of all, is one of the oldest and most curious of Jerusalem. Near its exterior door is still to be seen the ancient synamdre which used to summon the faithful. (We had already come across one

of these in the convent at Sinai.) Within it is a mixture of Byzantine basilica, mosque and Arab palace, with an encrustation of precious blue porcelain covering all its walls and all its massive pillars. The thrones of the patriarchs, the little doors of the sacristies and vestries are in mosaics of mother-of-pearl and shell, of very ancient Oriental workmanship. From the roof hang quantities of ostrich eggs, set in quaint mountings of carved silver. On the high altar is a triptych of finely wrought gold and translucent enamels. Blue, yellow, and rose-coloured Turkey carpets spread their thick covering of velvet over the pavement. And large veils hanging from on high conceal the inner tabernacles. They are changed, we are told, every week ; in a few days, for the feast of Easter, the most sumptuous will be hung there ; these now in position, on which rows of hieratic personages are displayed, were presented, a hundred years ago, by the Armenians of India.

It is here, before the high altar, amid this archaic and superb setting, that the priests, their handsome faces framed in black hoods and black beards, bring to us one by one the treasures of their collection.

Beyond all question, the Greeks possess at the Holy Sepulchre a far larger and richer

collection ; but the Treasury of the Armenians contains objects of a greater rarity and more exquisite taste. There is a missal with a cover of gold, presented six hundred and fifty years ago by the Queen of Sicily. There are tiaras of gold and precious stones of exquisite design and workmanship. There are episcopal mitres ornamented with emeralds and pearls. And there are fabrics that might have been woven by fairies ; one especially, a brocade of an old-cherry colour, which looks as if it were strewn with crystals of hoar-frost, as if it were covered with a silver rime, and which as a matter of fact is embroidered with a foliage of rare pearls and flowers of emeralds and pink topazes. To preserve these things against the usury of time they are kept rolled on long spools, which two priests, one at each end, carry. After genuflections before the high altar, repeated each time they enter, they spread these things on the ground, over the thick carpets. Scenes truly of the Middle Ages, these respectful unfoldings of stuffs, in this still sanctuary, amid the blue gleaming of the mural encrustation—what time, around us, deacons, coiffed also in the invariable black hood, are busy in the age-old preparations for Holy Week, fastening hangings to the pillars, raising and lowering, by means of silver chains, the lamps and the ostrich eggs.

On the left as one enters there is a kind of marble niche which looks as if it had been hollowed out of the thickness of the wall. It was here that St James was beheaded, and here still his head is retained. (His body, as we know, is in Spain, at Compostella.)

In secondary chapels, in recesses communicating with the church by little doors of mother-of-pearl, we are shown other curious tabernacles, singular and almost Hindoo in appearance, veiled by old curtains of Damascus velvet or Broussa silk. We see there, too, columns that were ravished in olden times from the Mosque of Omar, and bear obvious marks of their origin. In Jerusalem, which is one vast confusion of debris and splendours, these exchanges no longer surprise us. At the back of our minds, firmly fixed, is the notion of the sufferings endured by this city which to-day enjoys the calm of dissolution, the notion of the unprecedented upheavals which not once but twenty times have overturned the old soil of this vast cemetery.

In a sacristy covered with extraordinary faience, that is old beyond all reckoning, the Armenian priest who is our guide grows suddenly excited and gives expression to his anger with that Khosroës II. the Terrible who, so that he might omit nothing in his destruc-

tions, spent here some five years in ruining the churches from top to bottom, in smashing everything he could not take away, who led into captivity more than five thousand monks and took away into the heart of Persia the true cross. How strange it seems, in our day, to hear anyone raging at the memory of Khosroës! More even than the scene in which we find ourselves, it makes us lose for the moment all notion of the present century.

As we are leaving the venerable old basilica, a young deacon, in accordance with Eastern ceremonial, awaits us at the door to pour rose-water on our hands from a long-necked silver vase.

Truly in showing us thus exceptionally their Treasury, these kindly Armenian priests, with their cameo-like profiles, have given us, to soothe for a moment our infinite disillusion, a very charming vision of the past, in their church of faience and mother-of-pearl.

As I am on Mount Zion, I am going to spend the rest of the day, till sunset, wandering about this quarter of the Jews, who, especially since the last Russian persecutions, have flocked in large numbers to Jerusalem.

To-day is the Sabbath, and calm reigns

everywhere in their sordid quarter. All the little shops, where rags and old iron are bought and sold, are shut, and the customary hammering of the innumerable tin-plate workers is no longer to be heard. The handsome velvet robes and the fur caps, which yesterday were brought out from the wardrobes to make the journey to the Wall of Tears, are perambulated now in the spring sunshine. Many people in holiday garb are passing through the narrow, pestilential streets, with psalm-books in their hands.

The great synagogue. In the courtyard surrounding it children are playing, children too white and too pink. Some of them would be pretty if their eyes were not so cunning, their movements not so sly. It seems as if they were already aware of the hereditary reproach, as if they already cherished rancour against the Christians. Their blond hair is cut short, except above the temples, where the barber has respected those locks which later on will become the traditional corkscrew curls, but which, for the time being, look like spaniels' ears.

After all the splendour of the churches, this poor neglected sanctuary, with its empty benches, its plain rough-cast walls, from which the plaster is falling, excites a feeling almost of pity.

A few old men, grey-bearded, with grey corkscrew curls, are dozing in corners, in their long-furred caps. A few others, who are reading their Bibles in low mumbling voices, dart a suspicious look at us, a look that seems to glance along the slender nose. We enter without uncovering, and the guard escorting us assumes an expression of superb insolence. Some sparrows, in no wise disconcerted by the muttering of the prayers, come and go, bringing little strands of wool, little blades of straw for the nests they are building above the tabernacle itself, in the gilded flower-work of the crowning. They are perhaps the only thing in this lamentable temple with the saving quality of grace. The springtime sun, which floods the world without, bathing the refuse of the pavements and the ancient wood of the closed shop-fronts, enters here as it seems regretfully, casting a mournful light on these few ugly old greybeards and on all these empty places.

This coming night—which is almost the last, for I leave Jerusalem on the morning after tomorrow—I intend to devote to Gethsemane, although now I am more without hope than ever.

To spend a night there, in solitary contemplation, had been in my mind for many years.

Long after the mournful exodus of my faith, I continued to build on this unique spot I know not what irrational hope. It seemed to me that at Gethsemane I should be less far from Christ ; that if He had really triumphed over death, were it only as a very lofty and very pure human soul, there perhaps more than elsewhere my distress would be understood and I should be vouchsafed some manifestation of Him. . . . And I am going there this evening with a heart of ice and iron ; I am going there as a debt I owe my conscience, simply to accomplish a thing that for very many years I had had it in mind to do.

It is about eleven o'clock when I set out, and the moon is high. To go alone is quite out of the question, even with a revolver in one's belt ; I must needs take with me an armed guard, not merely on account of nocturnal dangers, in which I scarcely believe, but because the way lies by the forbidden approaches to the Haram-esh-Sherif, because the gates of the city are closed and can only be opened on an order from the Pasha, regularly transmitted.

Descending by the Via Dolorosa we traverse first of all the whole of Jerusalem, which is silent, dark and deserted. The houses are shut up. In the darkness of the vaulted streets

flicker at wide intervals a few smoky lanterns. Elsewhere the moonlight falls, making white figurings on the pavements and the ruins. Throughout our passage we meet none but two or three belated Turkish soldiers returning to barracks. The only noise is the sound of our footsteps, magnified by the resounding stones—and the clinking of the long silver-sheathed sabre which the guard wears.

The guard talks to me in Turkish: "Jerusalem, you see, at night, is a land of the poor; it is nothing at all. For us Mussulmans there is this"—and he points to the Sacred Enclosure, the Mosque of Omar, which we are approaching. "For you, a Christian, there is the Holy Sepulchre. But that is all. The rest is of no account. At night, you see, it is nothing."

In the quarter adjoining the Holy Mosque, which is forbidden to Christians, the guard exchanges words with the night watch—and we pass on.

Continuing to descend, we reach at length, in the darkness of a vault of stones, that gate of the city which opens on to the valley of the dead. The Christians call it St Stephen's Gate, and the Arabs the Gate of Mother Mary. It is shut, needless to say, and hard to open, heavy and overlaid with iron. The sentries of the night guard, whom our janissary awakens, swing

it on its enormous hinges. Slowly it opens, grating in the immense silence, and then, from the darkness that envelops us, we see, almost with a kind of dazzlement, the sudden apparition of a spectral country, immense and motionless, a vision all white—white stones bathed in a vague white light: the Valley of Jehoshaphat and Gethsemane, congealed, as it were, in the moonlight.

Below us dips the valley, filled with its infinite multitude of tombs; opposite, on the slope facing ours, rises Gethsemane. In the prevailing whiteness of the mountain the olives show like black stains, the cypresses like black tears. The convents follow one another in a dwindling succession; the great Russian church, with its kremlin-like cupolas placed one above another, takes on, in the distance and the moonlight, the appearance of a Hindoo pagoda. The whole, bathed in this pale light, is as charming as a vision of Asia, but it evokes no Christian thought. And it is a little farther on, beyond all these enclosures of priests and monks, that I intended to go. . . .

But, at the last moment, an ever-growing fear draws me away from the place where, my heart tells me, I shall find nothing. To delay a little longer the moment of final and desolate disillusion, I continue to wander idly in the

encompassing silence, following at hazard the bed of the Kidron, hoping that haply a spirit a little more tranquil, a little more devotional, may descend upon me.

Now, in the heart of the valley, we arrive before the three great monoliths of Absalom, St James and Jehoshaphat, at the foot of those rocky strata out of which they have been cut, and in which open the gaping mouths of so many sepulchres. The mournful ensemble stands out and rises up, in the white moonlight, with abrupt, clean-cut contours. Things long since done with, they seem dried up, holding together only by virtue of the tranquillity of the air, like those mummies which a mere breath suffices to make crumble into powder. A valley of death, a soil replete with the bones and dust of men, a silent temple of nothingness, where the sound even of the Apocalyptic trumpets could no other than congeal and die. And as we stand there weighed down with the depression of our surroundings, immobilised by the terror that issues from between the funerary columns, and rises out of the deep, darksome caverns, there reaches us suddenly, also from one of the great tombs, the sound of a human cough ; it seems to come from very far away and from a great depth, as if it had been

magnified and reverberated in the sonority of underground places. The janissary stops, trembling with fear—and he is a brave fellow, too, who was under fire at the side of the great Osman Pasha, the Ghazi, in the glorious defence of Plevna. “Oh!” he says; “there are some men sleeping there. . . . I should go mad during the night. . . . What sort of men can they be, in Heaven’s name, to sleep in such a place?” None other, no doubt, than Bedouin shepherds who have taken shelter with their sheep in the empty old sepulchres. But his imagination pictured vampires, wizards conjuring up spectres. And the sound, indeed, was so unexpected amid so much silence that I too trembled.

The hour grows late. It is later now, no doubt, than it was when Christ prayed alone there in His agony, for about midnight He was seized by the soldiers. We ascend slowly towards Gethsemane.

And, nevertheless, there is still no stir in the depths of my anxiously waiting heart; nothing but the vague influence of the moon and the tombs, the instinctive fear of all this white country.

Some lanterns appear in the distance, a score at least; people are coming from the direction of Ophel, and in haste too, almost running.



THE ROCK-CUT TOMBS OF THE VALLEY OF JEHOSEPHAT.

We had not expected to see anyone at such an hour. "They are Jews," says the janissary, with an expression of disgust. "They have come to bury one of their dead." And in fact I recognise the distinctive silhouettes, the long skimped robes and the fur caps. (Amongst the Jews, as we know, it is the custom to put a dead body out of sight, as a thing unclean, almost before it is cold, no matter at what hour of the day or night.) And so, with all speed, like men trying to perform clandestinely an ill task, they are burying this one.

And now, here at last, in spite of all the loitering that has prolonged my way, is Gethsemane, its olives and its melancholy stones. I have climbed to a spot near the slumbering Convent of the Franciscans, and there I stop. It is a place which the destructions of man have left almost as it must have been in the ancient days.

In order to be alone I say to the janissary : "Sit down there and rest ; you may have to wait for me some little time, an hour perhaps, until I call you." And I move away from him until he is out of sight, and, against the roots of an olive, lie down on the ground.

And nevertheless the things around still fail to make any special impression on me. It is

just an ordinary place, with no more than a touch of strangeness.

Opposite me, on the other side of the valley of the dead, the walls of Jerusalem have seemed to mount at the same time as I. The ravine, at the bottom of which the Kidron flows, separates me from them; it is vaporous and white to-night, in the excess of the moonlight. And above these cloud-like depths the walls are upreared to the same height as the spot at which I am; they seem to be suspended, chimerical. From here, during the night of agony, Christ must have seen them; against the sky they traced the same long straight line; not so embattled in those times, no doubt, for they were not then Saracen, and overtopped by the summit of that marvellous all-commanding Temple which now we cannot imagine. To-night above their battlements appears neither a human habitation nor a light; only the dome of the Mosque of Omar, on which the moon throws bluish gleams and above which shows the crescent of Mahomet. Near me, in my immediate neighbourhood, there is absolute solitude; there is the stony mountain which participates in the immense white radiance of the sky, which is as it were permeated with moonlight and in which the rare olives throw their shadows in delicate little black designs.

The barking of the dogs of Jerusalem, which at night is incessant, as it is in all Turkish towns, can scarcely be heard below, in the depth of the valley ; but it reaches me here, distant, sonorous and faint ; the echoes no doubt displace it, for it seems to come from above, to fall from the sky. And from time to time there mingles with it a nearer cry, the muted call of a night bird.

I lay my tired head against the olive. I am waiting for I know not what indefinite thing, and I am waiting without hope. And nothing comes to me, and I remain there with closed heart, without even a moment of relenting tenderness, such as I had at the Holy Sepulchre on the day of arrival.

And yet my unuttered prayer was supplicating and profound. And I had passed through "the great tribulation," through the slough of despond.

No, nothing ; no one sees me, no one hears me, no one answers me.

I wait—and the moments pass, and with them vanish for ever my last confused hopes. I feel that I have fallen into the void of voids.

Then, in a voice grown suddenly harsh and almost angry, I call the janissary who is

watching patiently beyond : "Come, I have done ; let us go back."

And, with heart completely disillusioned, for ever empty, bitter and almost revolted, I descend once more towards the old iron-bound gate, to re-enter Jerusalem.

The soldiers of the guard had left the gate on the jar for us, and I passed through it first, pushing slightly with my shoulder the heavy folding.

Thereupon the sentry, awakened suddenly from some somnolent dream, seizes me by the collar and utters a cry of alarm, while I turn about, in an unreflecting movement of defence, and take him by the throat, being indeed at that moment in a hard and irritable mood, apt for any act of instinctive violence. For two indecisive moments we remain thus in the darkness. The men of the guard run up and the janissary intervenes. On both sides there is recognition, followed by smiles. Seen in the light of the lantern which someone has brought, this Turkish soldier who arrested me seems a simple, kindly soul. He is full of excuses, fearful lest I should make a complaint ; but on the contrary I hold out my hand. It is I who was in the wrong ; I should have let the janissary precede me with the pass-word.

In deep night we climb to the Jaffa quarter, by that long Via Dolorosa which has become for me a street of no particular interest, albeit a little more sinister than the others, in an old Eastern city.

CHAPTER XXII

Sunday, 15th April.

MY last day in Jerusalem, the end of this disillusioning pilgrimage, which from hour to hour grows more and more chilling.

I awaken under the depressed and hard impression of the preceding night, with a feeling, first of all confused, of I know not what of finality, of irrevocableness, of implacability. And on all sides the masses are sounding, the joyous peals of the Sunday fill the air—to the glory of this Christ whom I have sought in vain. Along the street, bright with the gay spring sunshine, processions of little girls pass on their way to church, escorted by nuns; processions, too, of little boys, in fez and long Oriental robe, escorted by Brothers. And the Christian women of Jerusalem draped in Turkish fashion in white veils, and the women of Bethlehem in hennins adorned with pieces of silver and gold—all answering the call of the bells.

And now, beneath my windows, the whole street vibrates with a uniform strident cry, such as might be uttered in chorus by thousands of delirious swifts. I recognise the cry of joy

common to all Moorish and Arab women, the wild "You, you, you !" with which they accompany their dances and festivals. But this time it is for Christ, also. It is a pilgrimage of women who have arrived from the interior of Abyssinia ; they entered the Holy City this morning, and are greeting it with all the strength of their lungs, in accordance with the ancient custom. Clothed like the Bedouins of the desert, in black robes and black veils, they advance like a funeral procession, like a trail of mourning over the sun-bathed streets. Each minute they renew their great piercing cry, and the priests of their communion, black of robe and visage like themselves, who were awaiting them by the roadside, answer each cry with a gesture of blessing and "May your return be happy !" Grave, immersed in their dream, they advance without flinching under the mocking fatuous eyes of the modern tourists who look down upon them from the windows. I follow them with my eyes for a long time, these rattle-voiced phantoms ; at the end of the road beyond they turn—and their deliberate and rapid steps are bent directly on the Holy Sepulchre, in the first impulse of their barbaric ecstasy.

Before leaving Jerusalem I want to-day to visit for one last time the Sacred Enclosure of

the Mussulmans, to see once more the marvellous Mosque of Omar, that I may at least end my pilgrimage—in default of a happier chance, alas!—in the memory of its splendour.

To reach it I have to pass before the Holy Sepulchre, the approaches to which are more crowded than ever to-day. And as I pass, the impulse seizes me to enter there also, to say good-bye.

But when, having crossed the peristyle, I try to pass the great marble kiosk, I find my way barred by armed Turkish soldiers. It is they who maintain order here, who, sabre in hand, secure respect for the time-honoured agreements between the Christians of hostile persuasions. And to-day the place is reserved to Abyssinians and Copts. A black-visaged bishop, covered with ornaments of a strange archaism, officiates for some hundreds of black pilgrims, who are singing in a high-pitched voice, like the falsetto of the muezzins. I am not permitted to see, save at a distance, what passes before the altars, but the general effect is disquieting, idolatrous, savage; the cult of Isis or of Baal, in remote ages, must have been like to this.

But if this fore-court of the Holy Sepulchre, which is constantly open to whoever comes,

is confined, overhung and dark, around the blue Mosque, beyond, there is space, emptiness and silence.

It is some fifteen days since I last visited the Holy Enclosure, and in the interval the spring has been busy there; between the old white flagstones the grass has grown lustily, and the poppies and the daisies are flourishing with a new luxuriance.

To-day, under the few century-old trees, grouped here and there, at hazard, some Arab women are sitting in the shade, their feet in the flowers, and as we approach them they veil themselves to the eyes. But the space here is so ample that their presence is almost lost, and does not disturb the solitude.

In the immediate neighbourhood of the Mosque, where the flagstones are more intact and the grass is scantier and less tall, there is a mournful reflection of the sun from the white pavement and the secondary buildings, porticoes and mirhabs, which surround the sanctuary.

In the more resplendent light of to-day, the incomparable Mosque of Omar seems somehow to have aged: It still retains the brilliance of its marble, the changing reflections of its mosaics, the transparencies of its jewels and its glass-work; but it shows its thirteen centuries

in an indefinable air of dilapidation and dust which the sunlight accentuates ; it has the diminished splendour of beautiful things that are near their end ; it produces the effect almost of those old sumptuous brocades which hang together still, but which one scarcely dares to touch.

Beneath the great black rock in the centre is a kind of grotto, dark and infinitely holy, to which one descends by a flight of marble steps. Associated with this grotto there is a Mohammedan legend about the Angel Gabriel. Its low vault is polished smooth by the friction of human hands and heads—and here again one receives an impression of years without end.

The Mussulman sanctuaries, unlike those of the Christians, never induce the gentle mood of tears. They counsel rather a serene detachment and wise resignation ; they are asylums of repose from which one may contemplate the passage of life with the indifference of death.

In particular, this silent Haram-esh-Sherif, with its melancholy and its magnificence, is an isle of dreams which brings no emotion, no tenderness, but only calm and enchantment. And for me it is the refuge most fitting to-day

—just as that Islam to which I once upon a time inclined might, understood in a certain way, become later on the form of exterior religion, compact of imagination and art, in which my unbelief would find a home.

CHAPTER XXIII

O crux, ave spes unica !

Monday, 16th April.

THIS morning our horses were saddled and our trunks packed in readiness to leave Jerusalem and to continue our journey through Palestine towards the Saracen town of Damascus, in the hope of finding at least distraction and diversion in the death-like charm of Eastern things.

But an icy rain begins to fall from a sky uniformly black. Winter has suddenly returned, with roaring wind, torrential rain and hail.

And we decide to postpone our departure till to-morrow.

The day, like that of our arrival here, is spent by the fireside, amid a heterogeneous lot of people, in the devastating dreariness of a hotel sitting-room on a wet day. For our diversion there are the eternal sellers of crucifixes and rosaries, and the odious little reading tables littered with the latest papers from Europe.

Towards evening the rain ceases and I

wander out into the mournful little streets with their dripping house-tops. The sky is still overcast as I bend my steps for one last time towards the Holy Sepulchre, led thither by a feeling that escapes definition.

It is the desolate hour of the twilight, the hour before the night lamps of the basilicas are lit, when everything is left in darkness—and, left, too, without guards, as if in such a place profanation and sacrilege were beyond daring.

Near the entrance, on the “Stone of Unction,” a mother has placed her few months’ old infant, and, with a smile of confident joy, is gently rolling it, so that every part of its little body may come in contact with the holy marble.

Farther on the darkness increases—and I grope my way, brushing against indistinct groups that are walking without noise. Against the pillars, against the columns, black down-sunken heaps indicate the presence of the beggars, the cripples, the paralytics, who here are perpetual guests. Beneath the cloud of incense, which, above, catches still a little of the light from the cupolas, hangs the heavy, fetid odour of death.

By winding ways, which are now familiar to me, I proceed to the strange underground crypt of St Helena. It was to this same place

I came on the morrow of my arrival in Jerusalem, but now it is with a heart altogether different, a heart grown hard, in which the earlier emotion, alas ! no longer finds a place.

Afterwards, returning to the vicinity of the Sepulchre, I ascend almost involuntarily the staircase leading to the high chapel that stands on Golgotha.

And even here, in this place of ecstasies and sobs, it does not seem to me that anything in me is capable of emotion again. Calmly I examine the altar, the three upreared crosses, the three large figures of the crucified which stand out before a kind of silver-gilt rainbow ; then the very low ceiling, quaintly painted in the representation of a blue sky, in which are golden stars, and angels, and human-faced moons contemplating the earth. In spite of the candles and lamps and its exceeding smallness the chapel is filled with a persistent gloom. It is late, and at the moment, except for two or three weeping women sitting in dark corners, the place is empty:

But people, before leaving the Holy Sepulchre, continue to ascend one by one, to kneel here and offer up a prayer. Leaning against a pillar near the altar I stand and watch them.

First comes a young Cossack soldier, martial

and proud of bearing, who drags himself on his knees beneath the altar-piece to kiss the place where, in the rock of Calvary, the cross was fixed.

Some women whose nationality I know not, in long black veils, follow him; with arms upraised and outspread hands they pray and weep, in a language and according to rites which to me are unknown.

Presently an old woman arrives, humble, quiet, who kneels first of all at a little distance, as if not greatly daring. From her pilgrim's scrip she withdraws her Bible, her spectacles, a little candle which she lights; then she draws nearer, after an old-world reverence, to begin her genuflexions and her prayers.

There are intervals of silence and solitude, during which I can faintly hear, behind me, the light sound of stifled sobs.

And then others come, all with the same eyes of humility and faith.

When all is said, it was well to mark the precise spot, even if it was a pious fraud. For those who labour and are heavily burdened it is an unspeakable joy to come and weep there. And, moreover, if Christ sees them, these poor souls that kneel and pray, what matters to Him the error in place, so long as their hearts melt with gratitude and love, on this rock, in memory of His Passion.

Oh! they have chosen the better part, indeed, who, without understanding, adore. And to do as they do would not perhaps be quite impossible even now to the most subtle and clear-sighted among us; to do as they do, no longer out of simplicity—for one cannot become simple again, alas!—but, on the contrary, by a higher effort of our reason. For the inadmissible dogmas, the time-honoured and time-worn symbols, all these are not Christ, are no more than our inheritance from the simple-minded generations that have preceded us. And the vanity of these things proves nothing against Christ. He remains inexplicable always, and in spite of all, to anyone who takes the pains to ponder in his mind the texts of the Holy Scripture; and while the enigma subsists, hope may endure also. How narrow and childishly presumptuous are they who content themselves with the objections supplied by the limited logic of the human mind, who can dare to come to any conclusion, one way or the other, in the presence of the unfathomable mystery that underlies our whole existence!

I know indeed that there is the infinity of space, of matter and of worlds, of which the Bible seems to take no cognizance. And that even if it be admitted that a God should concern himself with so negligible a thing as the

earth, with the so infinitely negligible human things that inhabit the earth, even then many difficulties remain ; in the first place the multitude of souls accumulated since the dark night of the beginning of things ; and then those souls of a lower order that subsist beneath us, vague and disquieting, on the ill-defined limits of animality.

Evil and death, one is almost prepared to admit, may be necessary, as touchstones by which our souls may be proved ; and without them, too, there would be no sublime pity.

The Redemption is a greater puzzle to our reason, and, for my part, I cannot see the necessity for such a means ; the weighty words on the subject inscribed in golden letters on the crowning of the Mosque of Omar are the precise formula of my doubt : “ When God has decided a thing, He has only to say : Be, and it is.” But perhaps Christ—I fear that what I am going to say will sound very impious to many—perhaps Christ, being a man, and a man of His time, saw His rôle of Messiah only in a symbolical light in harmony with the spirit of the Ancient East and with the sacred writings anterior to His coming. And the gospels, in transmitting to us what He said of Himself, have concealed Him from us still more. He was not charged to lift for us the veil from the mysteries of causes

and ends, but only perhaps to bring to the little group of humanity a light, a certain indication of immortality and reunion, till such time as the more complete revelation should be vouchsafed to us after death. And in Heaven's name what matters a little more or a little less incomprehensibility, since of ourselves we will never discover so much as the why of our existence. Meanwhile, under the accumulations of nebulous representations, the word of love and the word of life radiate.

And this word, which He alone, on our lost little earth, has dared to speak—and with an infinitely mysterious certitude—if it is taken from us, there is nothing left; without this cross and this promise enlightening the world, our existence is no more than a vain agitation in the night, a movement of larvæ on the march to death. Those who once in their life have known what true love is will not contradict me—I mean love in its purest form, such as one has for a mother, for a son, for a brother. The others, the indifferent, the cynical, the proud, I am speaking now a language more than ever unintelligible to them.

In this chapel impregnated with tears, where the air is as it were softly murmurous with the prayers of the centuries, I review in my mind

these thoughts that have been mine a hundred times. . . . But to adore without understanding; as do the simple souls that come hither—they are the wise men, the true logicians of this world—requires no doubt an intuition and an uplifting of the heart which they still have and which I have no longer. . . .

Behind me now I hear the distinctive sound of knocking on the marble pavement, and looking round I see an old white-haired man on his knees, and beating his forehead against the ground.

And suddenly he gets up, his hands joined, his furrowed cheeks wet with tears, his eyes wide open in an expression of confident hope and more than earthly joy. He is old and done for, his earth-coloured face is already touched with death—but at this moment it is transfigured in a triumphant beauty, despite its plainness and decrepitude. In the hour of his inevitable dissolution, debris as he already is, he has contrived to grasp something that is radiant and of eternity; a grandsire that bids farewell, he feels that he will meet them again above, his children perhaps or his children's children—the curly head of some little child. Oh! faith, blessed and most sweet faith! Those who tell us: "Illusion is blissful, no doubt; but it is illusion and it is necessary

therefore to destroy it in the heart of men," are as senseless as if they suppressed the remedies that soothe and bring oblivion to suffering, under the pretext that their effect must cease at the moment of death.

And now, little by little, I feel that even I am becoming penetrated by the pleasantly deceptive impression of a prayer heard and answered. And I thought these dreams were gone for ever !

Last night at Gethsemane there was too much pride no doubt in my desire for solitude ; here I am in a place more fitting to my unhappiness, mingled with these humble ones who call with all their heart. They are my equals for that matter, and I have nothing more than they ; to-morrow my terrestrial joys will be dust ; a few years, which will pass as a day, and I shall become like the old man beside me. Oh ! to be able to pray as he is praying when the end draws near ; to pray as they all pray, to throw myself down on these stones of Golgotha and surrender myself in adoration. But this Christ of the gilded icons, whom they implore here, is too different from the Christ of my childhood ; and these exterior manifestations, these impulses that cause men to go down on their knees, are no longer possible to men of my generation. Even in this Chapel of Calvary, which for so many centuries has

been a place of tears, a sentiment of quite a modern kind holds me rigid and motionless in my place.

But nevertheless something begins to trouble my eyes ! It was unexpected and resistance was impossible. Behind this pillar which conceals me I too am weeping ; weeping at last all the accumulated and suppressed tears of my long sufferings of earlier days, in the course of so many changing and empty comedies which have been woven into my life. One prays as one can, and I can pray no better than thus. Standing though I be, here in the shadow, I am now, with all my heart, prostrated, as much as the old man in ecstasy by my side, as much as the soldier who, a little while ago, crawled to kiss the stones. Oh, surely, whatever men may do or say, Christ remains still inexplicable and unique ! As soon as His cross appears, as soon as His name is pronounced, everything grows quiet and changes, rancours melt away and dimly one sees the renunciations that purify. Before the least little wooden cross, proud hearts and hard hearts remember, become humble and learn pity. He is the Invoker of incomparable dreams and the Magician of eternal reunions. He is the Master of un hoped-for consolations and the Prince of infinite forgiveness.

And now, however strange it may appear, coming from me, I make bold to say to those of my unknown brothers who have followed me to the Holy Sepulchre: "Seek Him, you also; try . . . since without Him there is nothing! To meet Him you will not need to come pompously to Jerusalem, since if He is, He is everywhere. Perhaps you will find Him more readily than I have known how. . . ." And for my part I bless even this brief moment in which I have almost regained in Him the deep, ineffable Hope—until the void reappears to me to-morrow, darker than ever.

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